写作是一种纪念，

对自己的纪念，

对生活的纪念，

对岁月的纪念，

对情感的纪念.

希望我的文字能让所有我爱的和爱我的人回想起我们共同走过的日子.

(Magnolia, Autobiographical writing, January 2003)

Writing is remembering,

remembering my self,

remembering my life,

remembering my days gone by,

remembering my emotions.

I hope my writing will allow those whom I love and those who love me to remember the days we walked alongside one another.

(English translation by Yi Li)

University of Alberta

Where is Home:

The Lived Experiences of Three Chinese International Students in Canada

by

Yi Li

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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CRTED

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Date:

Dedication

献给我的父母，李兴华和杨莉芬， 是他们给了我第一个家；

献给我的公婆，周志扬和唐惠英， 是他们给了我第二个家；

献给我的先生周国杰和女儿周佳妍，是他们给了我现在的家。

To my parents, *Li Xing-Hua* and *Yang Li-Fen*, who gave me my first home;

To my parents-in-law, *Zhou Zhi-Yang* and *Tang Hui-Ying*, who gave me my second home;

To my husband *Zhou Guo-Ji* and daughter *Zhou Jia-Yan*, who are my current home.

Abstract

Using Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) approach to narrative inquiry, this dissertation explores the experiences and meanings of home and homelessness among international students after they have studied and lived in Canada for several years. The three research participants—Jasmine, Magnolia, and *Mei*—were born around 1980, finished their high school education in China, came to Canada and entered a high school university preparation program in Fall 1998, started their undergraduate programs at the University of Alberta in Fall 1999 and graduated with their Bachelor's Degrees in Spring 2003. The first set of field texts (data) for this study was collected during their fourth year of university; the final set in the following two years. During the collaborative research process, we shared our intense feelings about what it means to have a home, and what it means to feel/be homeless and how we are going to make a home in a new place in our future lives. Narrative accounts of three participants' experiences around home were constructed. Looking across the three narrative accounts, three resonating narrative threads were identified: home as place, home as relationship and home as life. The most important finding of this thesis is how each of the participants was awakened and began to think and question her taken-for-granted notion of home as a result of undergoing a dramatic transition from China to Canada. Though my study focused on Chinese students, it has significance for understanding home and homelessness in general.

Acknowledgement

When I began my doctoral program five years ago, I did not anticipate the encouragement, support, and care that I would receive along my rocky research journey. Many people have helped me to go where I wanted to go, even though at times I myself was not sure where I was going!

This study would not have been possible without the willingness of my research participants, Jasmine, Magnolia, and *Mei*. I thank you for your trust and confidence, for your friendship and for your support in times of difficulty. The stories of your experiences, your hopes and dreams have motivated me to carry out this study and I have learned so much from the experience. Now I have three friends to keep for life.

I am indebted to my supervisor, Dr. Olenka Bilash, who has taught me the importance of independence, patience, resilience and perseverance during my seven LONG years of graduate school. I am also indebted to my thesis committee: Dr. Normand Fortin, whose questions and comments challenged me to think more about what it means to be a narrative inquirer; Dr. Lucille Mandin, whose understanding and support warmed my heart on those chilly and dark days and whose gentle and graceful teaching continues to inspire me to become a teacher-educator inviting students to dance alongside; Dr. George Buck, my committee chair, whose strong presence during the final days of my doctoral program made a huge difference in my professional life as I embarked on my academic career path; Dr. Jean Clandinin, whose love, encouragement, and inspiration, in more ways than can be measured, helped me see new possibilities to relive my life and retell my stories; and Dr. Jill Bell, my external examiner, whose positive comments and thoughtful questions about my work will continue to engage me

to further my thinking and understanding of what it means to be a good narrative researcher.

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Prologue

Journal Entry: March 4, 2000, Edmonton

I first heard about the story of Fraser River Chinook salmon in B.C. Canada when I was on a guided canoe tour in Moose Lake, B. C., which is located 40 minutes drive west of Jasper, Alberta, the tourist town. I was working part-time as a motel front desk clerk there while waiting for my master's program to begin in the fall at the University of Alberta in Edmonton.

It was an early June morning in 1998, cold and wet. I had been in Canada as a new immigrant for three months. I still wore a thick jacket while the rest of the tour group were in their sweaters. As we were watching birds, moose and eagles around Moose Lake, one of the tourists brought up the topic of the salmon and the guide explained briefly to us.

Later that day, on a rafting tour along the Fraser River, the same guide showed us the spawning grounds of those Chinook salmon. I was not particularly impressed until he led us to the Rearguard Falls, where the Chinook salmon have to jump upstream in order to reach their home stream to spawn. There were no salmon to be seen at that time of the year and we were a little disappointed. However, the guide told us that the best time to come and watch those spectacular salmon was the last week of August and the first week of September.

It was not until one year later that I finally was able to go back and watch those Chinook salmon. In mid-August 1999, just before I returned to Edmonton to continue my graduate studies, my husband *Guoji* drove me and his friend to Valemont, B. C. from Jasper.

It was a sunny afternoon, but we could not see the peak of Mount Robson as usual when we stopped by at the Mount Robson provincial park information center. The clerk showed me, on a map, that there were two spots to observe those Chinook salmon. As the Rearguard Falls was near where we were, we went there first.

I had no difficulty finding our way to the Falls. We stood there for several minutes and nothing happened. We were about to give up when *Guoji* exclaimed, "Look, there's a salmon jumping against the Falls!" I stared at the Falls immediately, but saw nothing. Several minutes later, I did see a salmon jump out of the white water and disappear seconds later. I wondered whether it had succeeded in such rapid torrents.

We stayed there for about 20 minutes and I spotted three salmon jump out of the white water. I could not tell whether it was the same salmon or not as I was observing from quite a distance. But from the bottom of my heart I wished that these salmon would overcome this last obstacle on their long journey home when I left the Rearguard Falls and headed toward Valemont.

On the way I became silent, thinking about those Chinook salmon. They were hatched in fresh water, had spent part of their life in the ocean and now were coming home to spawn in fresh water. They would all die after spawning. Why would they make such an extensive freshwater spawning migration to reach their home streams after several years of residence in the ocean? What would make them want to go home?

My thoughts were interrupted by *Guoji*'s voice.

"Here we are! The Swift Creek!" he announced. I jumped out of the car and walked toward the creek.

I was the first to reach the side of the creek and was excited to see four or five big salmon swimming together along the bank, where the water was flowing relatively slowly. The water was so clear that I could see them right in front of my eyes. They varied in size. Some might weigh 10 pounds and others 30 pounds. It took them quite a while to swim even a short distance because they were moving upstream. One smaller salmon was rushed downstream, but very soon it turned around and moved against the water flow again.

I found a spot and sat down to watch the Chinook salmon closely while *Guoji* and his friend were walking farther and farther away from me. They were joking about how to catch some of those salmon and have a barbecue. They could not have meant it seriously, I said to myself.

I was lost in my own thoughts until I heard a splash. *Guoji* and his friend were back with some stones in their hands. His friend had just thrown a stone at a bigger salmon, who twisted and then continued on its journey.

"No! Stop it!" I heard my screaming voice.

"What's the matter? They are fish to be eaten!" his friend protested and was obviously offended by my reaction.

"Yes, but not at this stage of their life!" I replied angrily.

"There is no sign which says 'No Fishing' here", he continued.

"No, but I think at this stage of their life they should be protected rather than eaten. They have come a long way to reach this point. They deserve to be alive!" I insisted. Deep in my heart I was puzzled why there was no sign along the creek to stop such cruel behaviour.

While we were arguing, *Guoji* said nothing. There was a strange look in his eye when he tried to read my mind. People close to me knew that I loved eating fish and salmon was one of them, but not those from the Swift Creek!

Fortunately, there were other tourists coming towards us at that time. So both of them threw away those stones and *Guoji* said, "Let's go back!"

I was relieved and was happy to leave after I had taken some pictures of those wonderful creatures.

There was an awkward silence in the car after such an argument. In order to avoid further comment on the issue, I picked up the map and read it again, this time more carefully.

I did find what I wanted. On the reverse side of the map, there was one line, which said, "No molesting Chinook salmon in the Swift Creek!" I was right all along! When I told them about it, his friend said that they had not broken the law after all. No, but with a little help from me! I did not speak it out though.

I did not think about the salmon story until recently when I was struggling to find a metaphor to understand the journey many overseas Chinese students took and would continue to take. They were born and brought up in China, finished their high school or university in China, came overseas to study for at least one university degree, and then some of them would return to their homeland on completion of their studies. Their journey has a curious similarity to the life history of Chinook salmon…

* * *

I have lived with this story for more than five years now. I first wrote this story in Dr. Jean Clandinin's narrative inquiry course in March 2000. I wanted, desperately at that time, to find a metaphor to represent and to understand my cross-cultural journey from China to Canada. As I am thinking about other possibilities of how I might live my life differently in the future and where my home will be, this story keeps coming back to me in the foreground of my mind. I wonder what it means and what it is telling me…

"Salmon rapidly develop into adult fish while in the ocean spending most of their time feeding on a wide variety of small organisms and other fish, often travelling great distances while doing so... The majority of chinook mature after 3 to 5 years of ocean residence" (Harper, 1996).... "with a bluish-green coloration on the back which fades to a silvery color on the sides and white on the belly" (Delaney, 1994).

Chapter One

Where is My Home?

Journal Entry: September 2001, Edmonton

> "Mommy, I want to go home right now!" My five-year-old daughter *Yan-Yan* said to me, in English, again and again during our week-long trip in the Canadian Rockies in August 2001 when my parents flew in from Shanghai, China and stayed with us for three weeks.
> "Where is your home?" I asked *Yan-Yan* casually, in Chinese, on one occasion.
> "Michener Park!" She gave me the answer without any hesitation.
> "No, I mean, where is your REAL home?" I asked in a more serious manner. I was expecting *Yan-Yan* to tell me that her real home was in Shanghai, China, where she had lived for the first four years of her young life before coming to Canada last May.
> "Michener Park!" came the innocent answer.
> I wondered, for the rest of the trip, where MY real home was!
>
> (My reflections on September 6, 2001)

At the time of the trip, *Yan-Yan* had been in Edmonton for only 15 months and yet the rented house in Michener Park, a university residence for students with families, was already her home. I had been in Canada for more than three years (41 months) and yet I still did not feel that I had a home in Edmonton. I had lived in three rented apartments

before *Yan-Yan* came. We moved into this rented house in May 2000, but it was still not my home one year later. Christopher Alexander (1977) wrote,

> People cannot be genuinely comfortable and healthy in a house which is not theirs.... People will only be able to feel comfortable in their houses, if they can change their houses to suit themselves, add on whatever they need, rearrange the garden as they like it; and of course, they can only do this in circumstances where they are the legal owners of the house and land... (pp. 393-394).

I was afraid that I might lose the damage deposit of 150 dollars if I nailed some photo frames or taped some pictures onto the wall. I could not do anything to change the house in any way to suit our own needs. So the walls remained empty and the house was just a house for me. Besides, I was only passing through. I would just stay here for a year or two and move on. China was a better place for me to live and to work, I had decided. I chose not to buy a house. I chose not to look for career opportunities in Canada. I wanted to finish my graduate studies and go home as soon as possible. As Robert Hay (1988) pointed out, "[f]orming a bond to a place automatically seems to make that place the 'best place' in one's mind" (p. 161). I wanted to go home. I wanted to return to Shanghai where I belonged.

However, when I did return home, twice in the past three years, I was troubled by the realization that I could no longer return to those places I had known intimately for many years in the same way that I did before I immigrated to Canada. The good old days would just be gone forever. Robert Hay (1988) wrote,

> ...it is the general way of life that is missed after a move, with special places and people representing that way of life. If one returns home in a few years, the special places and people would be much the same, as would the way of life; after many years, the special places and people could have changed a great deal or vanished, and the way of life might be found only in history books. And so, we are in part the product of places at particular periods, and after a long absence, we really cannot "go home again" (p. 162).

My parents built and moved into a new house three months ago in a neighbourhood where my father grew up. His two brothers and one sister and their extended families still live there. They now live in separate apartments and are not far away from one another. Our old home, a two-bedroom apartment near the university where I had taught for almost a decade before coming to Canada in 1998, was too far away from their current business location for them to make any use of it. So they decided to rent it out to university students upon completion of the new house. When they told me the news over the phone, I felt sad. I could no longer return to my old home whenever I wanted to, just like in the old days.

My parents-in-law also intend to move out of their old three-bedroom apartment, which had been my home for three years before I immigrated to Canada. They are looking for a quieter and brighter and less polluted place in the same neighbourhood. They are reluctant to leave their old neighbourhood for a more commercialized, more populated and more expensive downtown apartment when their older son, my brother-in-law, makes the suggestion. Both *Guoji* and I support their decision to stay in the same neighbourhood because we know they have lived there since the late 1950s. In his book *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes and Values*, Yi-fu Tuan (1974) wrote,

> Familiarity breeds affection when it does not breed contempt. We are well aware of how a person can become deeply attached to old slippers that look rather mouldy to an outsider...a person in the process of time invests bits of his emotional life in his home, and beyond the home in his neighbourhood. To be forcibly evicted from one's home and neighbourhood is to be stripped of a sheathing, which in its familiarity protects the human being from the bewilderments of the outside world. As some people are reluctant to part with their shapeless old coat for a new one, so some people--especially older people--are reluctant to abandon their old neighbourhood for the new housing development (p. 99).

I am happy (and relieved) when I realize that both my parents and my parents-in-law have made the right choice about where they want to live for the rest of their lives. At the same time, I am sad because I know I cannot as readily call their new homes as mine.

Where is my home, then?

* * *

Journal Entry: August 12, 2002, Shanghai, China (one year later)

It is 35° C outside. The air is hot and humid. I prefer to stay inside my parents' air-conditioned new house, cool, dry and comfortable, just like summer mornings in Edmonton. I am sitting in front of a computer, checking and answering email messages from my friends and professors at the University of Alberta. It has been more than 10 days since I left Edmonton and lost my internet connection. I am overjoyed when my parents tell me that their computer has a dial-up internet connection. They are puzzled by my overreaction. For the next four days before I return to Canada they see me sitting there and "talking" with my friends and professors for at least half an hour a day.

This is the third time I have returned home during the past four and a half years. Unlike the previous two visits, this time I came back for a professional reason - to present a paper at an international conference. However, I am perturbed by what has happened at the conference: gender imbalance and inequality, paper-reading presentation format, and poor organization. I find myself outraged and very impatient with these things. It is so different from what I have imagined. I wonder if I want to return to China and find a place in this academic world. If not, where will I work?

The prospect of being "homeless" personally and professionally in both China and Canada was so depressing that for almost a year I asked myself, on a regular basis, whether I should continue my doctoral work. And at times I even wondered whether this busy and stressful graduate student's life I was living made any sense at all.

Reading Barbara E. Lovitts' (2001) book, *Leaving the Ivory Tower: the Causes and Consequences of Departure from Doctoral Study*, I learned that the "rate of doctoral student attrition in the United States has consistently been estimated to be around 50 percent" (p. 2) since the early 1960s and that the "attrition rate of women – as well as that of racial and ethnic minorities – is considerably higher than 50 percent" (p. 2) even though the exact figure is unknown. Will I survive this "painful, joyless ordeal" (p. 172) of graduate education and become one of the "completers" (p. xiii) or will I become one of those "departers and noncompleters" (p. xiii) because "the ultimate outcome, the Ph.D., was not worth the personal and psychic costs of pursuing it" (p. 172)? I wondered...

Can this be My Home?

Journal Entry: January 28, 2002, Edmonton (seven months earlier)

It is now 3:10 p.m. I am sitting in front of my home computer, trying to decide which stories to tell about a place that has distinctive meanings and values for me for Dr. Julia Ellis' course *Children and Place*. I find the thread of moving between *out-of-placedness* and *in-placedness* keeps coming back to my mind. I try to push these thoughts aside and focus on one particular place.

Looking through the big living-room glass window, I notice it is sunny outside with the beautiful Alberta blue sky that I have come to love so much. But I know better now than to be deceived by the seemingly warm sunshine. The ground is still covered by ankle-deep thick snow. Outside it is -15° C, a number that my family and friends in Shanghai have never heard of for their winter temperature. I prefer to stay inside the house. Two totally different worlds! How am I going to bridge them and live happily and peacefully in either of them?

This is my fourth winter in Canada. I still have great difficulty falling in love with the Edmonton wintry weather. But, I have already noticed some changes in me. For the first time in my life, I was willing to try on ice skates last Sunday with a group of first-time-on-ice international students in Michener Park. To my surprise, I did not dread it as much as I thought I would. I understood and accepted that I would fall down, inevitably as a part of the process of learning how to ice-skate. Previously, I had refused my Canadian friends' invitation onto the ice rink again and again, telling them that I did not want to break my "old" bones. I want to keep them the way they are when I return to my home in Shanghai, China.

However, for the past two weeks I have been puzzled by a strange feeling which I am not sure how to articulate yet. I wonder what is really happening to me and why at this time in my life. I was both happy and sad. As I saw the possibility of my settling down in Canada was slowly becoming a reality, I was reluctant to let go of my "going home" story, a story I have lived by for so long (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995).

Sitting on the selection committee as a graduate student representative for the Department's new academic position in Second Languages Education for the past two

weeks, I was able to see things from a different perspective--an insider's, so to speak. The fact that two of the four short-listed candidates were recent arrivals of Chinese ethnicity was very significant for me. I came to see new possibilities that I was never able to imagine I could have in Canada. For the first time in four years, I felt that I might find a place in this new country and that I might even succeed in my academic career and belong here!

Do I Want a Home Here?

Journal Entry: May 2, 2002, Edmonton

I felt exhausted after two nights and two days in Camp He Ho Ha (Health, Hope and Happiness), a place 90 kilometers west of Edmonton for the department's spring retreat this year, April 29 - May 1. As one of the department's graduate student representatives serving on different committees, I was invited to join in. I accepted the invitation partly because of its name: Health, Hope and Happiness. At that time I had none. I needed to get away from the campus and my family to be alone, even for a little while.

I was at the bottom of my depression. I asked myself daily the question, "Why are you doing this Ph. D.? If you don't enjoy what you are doing, why not just give up and find something more important, more meaningful to do?" At that time, I found myself teaching Mandarin, English, and Math to my daughter instead of writing my candidacy proposal. I resisted the writing.

Looking back, I wonder whether I have made the right decision. I don't sleep well in strange places. Even the slightest noise wakes me up. More importantly, what was being discussed at the meetings bothered me.

While the selection committee experience allows me to see new possibilities that I can have in North American academia, the professors' comments at the spring retreat made me shiver inside and reconsider my future career.

"It used to be more collegial around here," I heard one of them saying.

"I don't know why there is this competition, this tension." Another echoed.

"There is a lack of calmness. Everybody is so busy!" The third commented.

"Busy in their own room, in front of a computer, and with piles of work on their desk!" The fourth agreed.

I know what they were saying. I know what my future life would look like if I want to get an academic position at a university. The prospect scares me. If I go to my office on weekends, whom do I find still working in his/her office? The newly hired assistant professors! I ask myself, do I really want to live such a busy life?

How am I going to resolve this internal conflict: what I am doing right now might lead me to a life that I don't want to live. Are there any other possibilities? What can I do in order to seek out those possibilities?

On the Spring Retreat Satisfaction Survey, I couldn't help but write down the following comments:

> I am glad to notice that spring has finally come! The retreat has made me aware of the importance as well as the need to build a community of scholars, who can dialogue and support one another!

I Can Make My Own Home?

Journal Entry: June 3, 2002, Edmonton

Finally I decide to sit down in front of the computer. Where do I start? Maybe I should begin with the conversation I had with Janice Huber two weeks ago. We had planned to meet and talk to each other after the weekly conversations on Research Issues in Teacher Education at the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development (CRTED). Janice suggested that we have a cup of coffee or tea at Second Cup. But at that moment I wanted a quiet place where the two of us could really talk.

I had hoped that we could take a walk around campus or in the nearby parks. I really wanted to walk on the grass or sit in the sun. Looking out of the window, we saw a grey sky and a very strong wind. A storm was coming. "The only place around here would be a classroom, then." Janice said. I shook my head. In the end, we stayed in the Centre and talked for a while.

There were people around talking to one another, but they were away from the "table". As we sat down at one corner of the table, I saw a puzzling look in her eyes. Why, Lisa[1], why didn't you tell the group your lived story? Janice seemed to ask me, not your cover story (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). I had told Janice that I was going through another depression for the past two months or so. What had made this one worse than the previous one was that I did not have a good reason for it. My immediate family is with me and I have completed my two-year required residence for my doctoral program. Once I have my candidacy done, I can start looking for a job, several Canadian friends had told me.

---

[1] Lisa was my English name at that time.

Everything seemed all right except for the fact that I felt depressed and I resisted writing my candidacy proposal! I started this writing with Jean last summer and she has offered me so many valuable suggestions. Why did I stop doing it? I did not know. I just did not feel like doing it.

Not until Janice asked me the question, "Does this resistance somehow relate to your research topic?" did it dawn on me that all the while I was struggling with myself - my research topic is making a home in a new place and I still have great difficulty positioning myself professionally and personally in this new country. For the past five months, I have experienced both the joy of seeing new possibilities for my future career and the anxiety of doubting whether I want to live such a professional life. I feel lost again. I have many good reasons to finish my Ph. D. as soon as possible: personal achievement, professional advancement, better salary (only if I can find a job) and higher social status. Yet I also have many equally good reasons to leave the program as soon as possible. I enjoy teaching my daughter Mandarin and English and learning French alongside her. I want to spend more time with her and my husband. Yet I find myself sitting in front of the computer doing something that I prefer not to.

Jean mentioned "narrative coherence" (Carr, 1986) in one of the recent conversations. I reread David Carr's (1986) book *Time, Narrative and History*. I was struck when he wrote,

> Our lives admit of sometimes more, sometimes less coherence; they hang together reasonably well, but they occasionally tend to fall apart. Coherence seems to be a need imposed on us whether we seek it or not. Things need to make sense. We feel the lack of sense when it goes missing. The unity of self, not as an underlying identity but as a life that hangs together, is not a pregiven condition but an achievement. Some of us succeed, it seems, better than others. None of us succeeds totally. We keep at it. What we are doing is telling and retelling, to ourselves and to others, the story of what we are about and what we are (p. 97).

Looking back on my past experiences, I see much incoherence in my life. At the same time, I also see my "constant effort, even a struggle, to maintain or restore narrative coherence in the face of an ever-threatening, impending chaos at all levels" (Carr, 1986, p. 91) in my life.

It has taken me more than four years to feel that I can fit in this new place, and that I can learn to live in a new language. Like Eva Hoffman (1989), I am learning to translate myself carefully "by slow increments, sentence by sentence, phrase by phrase" (Hoffman, 1989, p. 211). In the process, "I am being remade, fragment by fragment, like a patchwork quilt" (ibid. p. 220). It is a slow, and often painful process. Time does not necessarily heal all wounds, but it does allow me to establish new ties to people and places to replace the old ones that I have left behind. Despite my resistance, I have become a hybrid creature - a partial Canadian, a sort of permanent resident (ibid. p. 221). As my sense of this place changes, the sense of who I might become also changes. "Knowledge of places is therefore," wrote Keith Basso (1996), "closely linked to knowledge of the self, to grasping one's position in the larger scheme of things, including one's own community, and to securing a confident sense of who one is as a person" (p. 34). Now I realize that I can make my own home in Canada if I choose to.

Canada – My Adopted Home

Journal Entry: November 5, 2004, Edmonton (more than two years later)

Tears come to my eyes as I type in "Canada – My Adopted Home"… It has been such a LONG journey for me…

On July 22, 2002, I finally mailed out my Canadian citizenship application package, almost one and a half years past the date when I became eligible to apply. I was planning to go to an international conference with my colleagues in Minneapolis, Minnesota, U.S.A. in May 2003. I did not want to go through the trouble of applying for a US visa because I carried a Chinese passport.

On the application form, I decided to keep my Chinese name Li Yi (last name first name) as my legal name without adding my English name Lisa to it. Because of my initial resistance of saying my name the Canadian way Yi Li instead of the proper Chinese way Li Yi and my lack of confidence in Canadian's proper pronunciation of my first name Yi (fourth tone, the Chinese character means easy as an adjective and change as a verb), I adopted the name Lisa without my family name when I immigrated to Canada in March 1998. Very soon, one of my Canadian friends in Jasper called me Lisa Li and it has become my name ever since… and somehow I lost Yi in the process…

In March 2001 when I took my unbound master's thesis to Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for final approval, I was told that I had to remove Lisa from the document because it was not on the University's official record. Unless I went through a legal name change, I had to use my name Yi Li on my thesis title page. I said that I liked my name and would not change it. So I was Yi Li on my four official copies of the thesis and Lisa Yi Li on those complimentary copies I gave to my professors and friends.

It was not until my doctoral candidacy exam in November 2002 that I finally came to terms with the three different ways of saying my name: I was/am/will be Li Yi; I am happy to have become Yi Li; and I do not mind if you still call me Lisa Li.

However, when I received our department's newsletter *News & Notes* (Vol. 26, No. 1, Fall 2002), I was surprised to see my name in 5 different places: 3 Lisa Li's + 2 Lisa Yi's = 5 confusions! What was/is/will be my name, I wondered. I decided that it was time for me to write a piece and to define who I was/am/will be myself. I entitled my writing *Reclaiming My Rightful Name* and submitted it to *News & Notes* (Vol. 26, No. 2, Winter 2003, p. 17). It took me five years to feel that it was O.K. to have all these three different names living alongside one another peacefully within one single me and to have the courage and confidence to teach my Canadian friends how to say my Chinese name properly.

On January 22, 2003, I went to the Citizenship Court Room in downtown Edmonton to take the citizenship knowledge test. While waiting for the test to begin, I wrote the following in my journal in English:

> It is now 9:45 am. I am writing this in the citizenship test room. There are more people with black hair and who speak languages other than English. Around 30 people are in the room. Outside it is -31°C with 15 – 20 cm thick snow. I wonder if I really want to stay here in such bitterly cold weather. On second thought, I am HERE NOW regardless of this cold.
> My head still feels dizzy from cramming those facts about Canada in the past few days and from waking up at 3 am this morning and not getting back to sleep sooner. Is this just my test anxiety as usual or is it too big a moment in my life?

On March 6, 2003, five years after I first landed in Canada (March 9, 1998), I took my oath of citizenship and became a Canadian citizen in Edmonton, Alberta. Before I went out to take the bus to attend my Citizenship Ceremony that morning, I heard the CBC 740 news announcer saying, "It is -23°C in downtown Edmonton with wind chill

-33°C. Today is probably the coldest day in March in Edmonton history!" *Guoji* decided to stay at home and *Yan-Yan* went to school as usual. *Guoji* became a Canadian citizen in 1994 in Edmonton, Alberta. We applied for Canadian citizenship for *Yan-Yan* when she was 50 days old in 1996 in Shanghai, China. "Finally, you are becoming one of us, Mommy!" *Yan-Yan* said to me before I headed out to the cold snowy world.

Sitting on the bus in my long and black and heavy winter overcoat, I reassured myself that I did want to become a Canadian even in such cold weather! I was greatly relieved when I arrived at the Citizenship Court Room. I realized that I was NOT the only crazy person, who had decided to become a new Canadian on that particular day among all those 365 days!

There were 64 people from 24 different countries who became new Canadians on that day, the Citizenship Court judge told us. The judge himself, wearing traditional Indian clothes with a red turban on his head, came to Canada 35 years ago from his native India. He reminded us that the day we became Canadians was also the 5th International Day for Women's Rights. He emphasized that it was the Canadian values that kept all the peoples in Canada together.

Looking back, I know that day was a turning point in my life. Even though my initial motive to obtain Canadian citizenship was practical and instrumental, I become clearer and clearer later that I DO want to be a Canadian. That conscious choice marks my final acceptance of a hyphenated identity: a piecing together of the wanted fragments from my varied and often competing identifications with two languages and two cultures (Sheehy, 1976, p. 51). A hyphen that enables me to compose my own identity -- a consistent way of behaving and feeling that made sense both to myself and to others who

meant the most to me (Sheehy, 1976, p. 51) in my two very different worlds. A hyphen that allows me to connect, not to separate, my previous homes in China and my present and future homes in Canada.

* * *

Like salmon, who rapidly develop into adult fish while in the ocean after 3 to 5 years of ocean residence because they spend most of their time feeding on a wide variety of small organisms and other fish and often travel great distances while doing so, I have also grown and changed during my 6-year residence in Canada. Through my daily contact with people from a wide variety of social, cultural, linguistic, and religious backgrounds in a culture mosaic country like Canada, I have learned to accept and respect different values, perspectives and behaviours. I have travelled "a long distance" physically, mentally, and emotionally…

Unlike salmon, who die soon after making their incredible journey upstream to the place they were born, my journey will continue to shift and change my identity as I experience new things…

"Each female deposits from 3,000 to14,000 eggs in several gravel nests, or redds, which she excavates in relatively deep, moving water" (Delaney, 1994). "By laying a large number of eggs, salmon increase the chance that more of their offspring will survive to return as adult spawners. Approximately 1% of the eggs will survive to this stage" (Harper, 1996).

Chapter Two

Where are Our Homes?

Journal Entry: November 2001, Edmonton

Between September and October 2001, as I was still struggling to figure out what to do for my doctoral research, I took Dr. Julia Ellis's course on interpretive inquiry. One of the course assignments was to carry out a mini-study and present it to class participants. Because I was preoccupied with the notion of home and homelessness, I interviewed three of my four close Chinese friends - Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei*[2]. I wanted to know what it was like for them when they returned home after two or three years' absence and what the meaning of that experience was for them.

I first met Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* on February 19, 1999. Their ESL teacher, a Canadian friend of mine who was also doing her master's degree in my department, asked me to be an interpreter for a group of 11 international students from China she was teaching in a local high school. She took them to the university campus on the University

[2]Jasmine, Magnolia, and *Mei* are all pseudonyms. *Mei*, 梅，plum blossom, is a red or yellow flower that blooms only in winter. The colder the weather becomes, the more eagerly they bloom and the more beautiful these blossoms are. It used to be the national flower of China before communist rule. *Mei* picked this name because she was born in late December.

Preview (open hours for prospective students) and a student volunteer was showing them around the university between 10 and 11 a.m. I met them in the Butter Dome at 9:30 and was introduced to them as Lisa. While we followed the volunteer around the campus, I did the English-Chinese interpretation for them. I could not tell who was who on that day, but I did remember that there were only four young women in the group. Around 12 noon, I said good-bye to them and returned to my office, thinking to myself that I would probably never see them again.

About 4 p.m. on September 12, 1999, when I was walking to my locker in the women's locker room in the university gym, a surprised voice called my English name, "Is that you, Lisa?" It was Jasmine! I was amazed that she still remembered me and even recognized me! She and Rose[3] (the fourth young woman in that group) had just finished swimming and were blow-drying their hair. I was both surprised and happy to know that all four young women were admitted to the university.

Jasmine, Rose and I chatted happily for a while and then exchanged our phone numbers to keep in touch. On September 22, Jasmine called and invited me to their place for a get-together since the Mid-Autumn Festival, a traditional Chinese holiday for family reunions, was around the corner. I went to Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei*'s shared one-bedroom apartment and stayed overnight. Rose was staying at her cousin's at that time, but she also came and joined in our conversations and stayed overnight.

Although Jasmine, Magnolia, *Mei* and Rose all passed the minimum English language requirement of the university, they were very worried about their ESL course. If

[3] Rose is another pseudonym.

they failed it, they had to leave their university studies. Since they felt that they needed to improve their listening and speaking skills the most, we decided to have regular weekend meetings for English conversations. We talked about everything, but mostly about our schooling experiences in both China and Canada. I tape-recorded all the conversations so that they could go back and listen to their own English and I could help them analyze the mistakes they had made. However, they were not interested in listening to their "broken English" and they were just too busy finishing one assignment after another, rushing in between their courses and wondering if they were going to stay in their programs by the end of the fall term.

It was not until the third conversation that I realized that they were experiencing the same academic difficulties that I had experienced when I started my graduate studies a year before. I began to have this vague feeling that what we shared could become the focus of my master's thesis research. A telephone conversation with my Canadian friend, their high school ESL teacher, clarified my thinking. As our weekly sessions of English conversation practice went on, my research questions started to emerge. I then invited Jasmine, Magnolia, *Mei* and Rose to join me on a research journey to explore our transitional experiences in Canada (Li, 2001). In addition to our research group conversations, we also went shopping, cooked and ate together. If we had time we went to the gym to do some exercises or we rented a movie and watched it together. I helped them with their English essay writing. I listened to Rose's stories of her puzzling experiences living with her cousin's family. I helped a panicked Magnolia when she could not hand in her chemistry report on time because she could not print it off a computer. As time went by, we knew one another better and better and an intimate

relationship developed. "We girls trust you, Lisa[4]! You are our friend and mentor!" they once told me. And Magnolia asked me if I would like to become her soul mate. When that research journey ended, we maintained our regular contact as friends and continued to share many additional common experiences, including each of us going home to China. The notion of *home* and *homelessness* did not surface until each one of us returned from that trip. (Rose did not go home until December 2001. She later decided not to join my doctoral study for personal reasons.) We were puzzled and confused by our experiences of going home. I wanted to understand what happened to all of us.

On September 28, October 2 and October 10, 2001, I met Magnolia, Jasmine and *Mei* individually in a small room in the Education Building over lunch. We met for two hours and I tape-recorded our conversations on three 90-minute-long tapes. Since they preferred to talk in Mandarin Chinese, I translated our conversations from Chinese to English when I was transcribing those tapes. Based on the Chinese conversation tapes and their English translation transcripts, I retold Magnolia and *Mei*'s experiences in narrative accounts and I wrote poems to re-present Jasmine's and my own experiences.

This research experience helped me to tease out some of the threads common to those who move back and forth, forever floating, between two different countries, in our case, China and Canada (He, 1998). The writing process and its analysis helped me to better understand my experience as well as the experiences of others in similar situations. We all shared similar experiences, the so-called "reverse culture shock" (Wang, 1997), when we returned home to China after being away for a couple of years. But there were

[4] I was reluctant to be called an aunt by Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* although I am older than they are. They wanted to show their respect, but I did not want to feel old. So we negotiated and I was/am/will be Lisa to them throughout this writing as well as in real life.

individual differences as well. Because of my family and career, I seemed to experience more discontinuity and fragmentation than they did. However, their cross-cultural journeys were no less traumatic than mine. The shock, confusion and guilt Magnolia felt during her first trip home after two years' study in Canada was so deep and far-reaching that one year later when she talked about it with me those emotions were still on her face and in her voice. *Mei*'s sense of time changed drastically. Before returning home, she did not think that two years seemed a very long time for her. But so many changes had taken place in her family during her two years of absence that made her feel that two years was a long time. Her mother did not tell her that her grandmother was very sick until she was home. Shortly after she returned to Edmonton to resume her university study in 2000, her grandmother died of cancer. A year later, her uncle died at the age of 50. An aunt she knew quite well asked for a divorce and left her two-year-old baby daughter behind. *Mei* used to think that she was a good wife and mother. So many significant events happened within two years! *Mei* felt it was a very long time to her! Jasmine did not return home for a visit until she had stayed in Canada for three years (August 1998 - August 2001). One month after she came back to Edmonton, on September 5, 2001, we had this fresh and lively conversation about her experience. Jasmine stayed in China for less than a month. She didn't fly home directly. Instead, her father and one of her female cousins met her at the Shanghai International Airport and they toured Shanghai and its two neighbouring cities for five days before heading home. Once home, Jasmine experienced an old recurring tension between herself and her mother, who used to control every aspect of her life as she was growing up and made her very dependent. Being far away from her mother and living on her own for three years in Canada helped Jasmine to become a more

mature and independent person and she was very pleased with herself. She longed for that day of "true independence" when she could support herself financially!

While Magnolia and *Mei* stayed in Canada for two years and Jasmine did for three years before they each returned home, they all experienced some initial discomfort of adjusting back to the Chinese way of life. They found that small details of everyday life irritated them easily and they wanted to return to Canada immediately. For example, they were all surprised to notice that they could no longer cross streets in China with ease as they used to. Magnolia chose to use a zebra crossing instead of following her friends to jaywalk. She reasoned that if something happened at zebra crossing, the driver should be responsible, which was a very strange and foreign thought to her Chinese friends. *Mei* was scared to death because cars and buses came and went whenever and wherever they wanted and she did not know when to cross a street and when not to. Jasmine just followed other pedestrians when crossing streets since she did not dare to do it on her own. Magnolia used to love some deli food sold in the market and she really missed them while she was in Canada; however, when her mother took her to the market to buy them, she said that they were too dirty. *Mei*'s parents thought that she did not eat good and nutritious food in Canada, so they made her eat a lot of her favourite seafood during the first two days and she had an upset stomach. On the third day, she asked her mother for some instant noodles. Jasmine resented being urged to eat as much as possible at every meal even though she did not feel like eating at all. At home three meals a day became a burden for her. She did not want to eat out, either, but felt that she had to go! Magnolia, *Mei* and Jasmine all knew that the bathing facility in China was much better than it was in the past. They could take daily showers if they wanted now that they had water

heaters. But in Canada it was more convenient and faster. As soon as they turned on the tap, the hot water was coming. The bathrooms were bigger and brighter in Canada than those in China. Nothing looked good enough for Magnolia, *Mei* and Jasmine during the first few days at home and they complained a lot. However, as time went by, they became less and less eager to come back to Canada. In fact, *Mei* did not want to return towards the end of her trip home. She even attempted to change the date of her return plane ticket so that she could stay home longer, but she failed. There was no vacant space for her to make the change in August, the high season for tourists to come to Canada. With time, their physical bodies adapted more readily back to a familiar rhythm of life with a familiar climate in a familiar place. As Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* felt more and more comfortable with themselves at home they became reluctant to return to Canada. However, deep inside all three young women felt that their hometowns would become "a place just to visit" in the future. They would choose to live and work elsewhere for the rest of their lives, which confirms Yi-Fu Tuan's (1996) observation that "the life-path of a human being moves naturally from 'home' to 'world,' from 'hearth' to 'cosmos.' We grow into a larger world" (p. 2).

On November 6, 2001, I presented this mini-study to the 16 class participants of the interpretive inquiry course. I shared with them the whole research process by starting with my own stories. Little did I know beforehand that I would break into tears in the middle of reading my own poem on an overhead transparency.

My Heart Broke

My heart broke
on a rainy Spring day
when I left behind
my one and a half year old daughter

two jobs
and a comfortable home

My heart broke
when I learned
my two-year-old daughter
was going to a universal daycare
where she would spend
five days and four nights a week
on her own

My heart broke
when I rushed home
only to find myself a stranger to her
one year apart
in two different new worlds
we both struggled, alone…

My heart broke
when I had to leave her behind
the second time
in the hope
I would finish my degree
s-o-o-n

My heart broke
when that dream floating away
I collapsed
running away from campus
into the mountains
to die alone

My heart broke
when my daughter followed me
wherever I went
Canada, a strange new place
she was afraid
I would disappear the third time
and leave her alone

My heart broke
when I realized
what a fragmented life
I had lived
in those three years

on a foreign land
not my own

This poem poured right out of my finger tips as I sat in front of the computer, thinking about my leaving home and going home experiences four days before the presentation. This was supposed to be all intellectual work! Feeling ashamed and embarrassed, I fought to control my strong emotions, but the tears kept streaming down my cheeks. The classroom grew very quiet. After what seemed to me a very long pause, I continued with my presentation. I shared with them that what surprised me the most was how difficult it was to tell my own going-home stories and to try to make sense out of the discontinuity and fragmentation I experienced as a new immigrant, mother, wife, teacher, and graduate student. There were no coherent stories (Carr, 1986) for me to tell around home. Another surprise was the fact that the poem came to me in English, my second language. When I tried to translate it back into Chinese I found it very awkward to express my emotions in my first language. It sounded remote and detached from my reality. How could that happen to me? If "language is the home of our being" (Max van Manen, personal conversation, October 1999), would I have a second home for my being once I mastered a second language? I wondered.

The other surprises included the individual differences of experiencing the same phenomenon, the numerous daily life challenges of readjusting back to the Chinese way of life, the changing relationship with parents, family and friends in China and the fact that Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* no longer wanted to spend the rest of their lives in their hometowns. Where will be their future homes? What is home for them, then? I started to wonder.

Coming to My Research Questions

Journal Entry: September 2002, Edmonton (10 months later)

In his Introduction to the book *Out of place: Stories and Poems* (Begamudre & Krause, 1991), Alberto Manguel wrote,

> We perceive the world in one of the two ways: as a foreign land or as home. We are either astounded by the differences or comforted by the similitudes between places. Wherever it is we make our home we behave either as wanderers or as travelers returned (p. xi).

East or west, home is best. However, to Jasmine, Magnolia, *Mei* and me, who move back and forth between two cultures, home - as we used to know it - is lost inevitably. Our going-home stories are an awakening (Clandinin & Connelly, 1991). We awaken to the complexity of living a life in between two countries and two languages. We no longer feel at home when we return to our home country and it will take us quite a while to feel somewhat at home in this new country. Maybe we will never feel at home in Canada. Our stories, theirs and mine, and the ways in which they and I are situated in relation to stories of migration, displacement and search for home interest me. I want to try to understand how we compose and live out those difficult stories of being "homeless" and how we can transform "a foreign land" into "home". Within these large questions are even more puzzling questions: What is home? What is required for a place to be called home? What should one feel? What should one picture? When does one know that he/she is home? What makes a land foreign? When does a foreign land become home? At what point does it become home? What needs to be done in order to change a foreign land into home?

Situating the Inquiry Historically

For the past five or six years in China, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of high school students who want to pursue their post-secondary education overseas. Because of China's one-child policy and because education is highly valued in Chinese culture, parents in China try every means possible to help their children complete at least one university degree.

With this latest trend of younger students studying abroad, many of them come to Canada. My research participants - Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* - belong to this latest group of students. Each is the only child of their respective families, finished their high school education in China and came to Canada for their first undergraduate degrees. Compared with students who came from China in the past, their situation is much better in terms of financial resources, age, English language proficiency, and knowledge about North American culture.

"Going abroad fever" in China: a historical context

According to Ms. *Lin Xu* (2001), the Education Consul at the Consulate General of the People's Republic of China in Vancouver, between 1978 and 2000, there were more than 300,000 Chinese students and scholars who went abroad. Among them, 100,000 came to the United States, 50,000 came to Canada and 50,000 went to Great Britain. The rest went to Japan, Germany, France, New Zealand and Australia. Up until 2000, around 100,000 had returned to China. Sitting in the lounge at the International Centre with about 50 Chinese students and scholars on that cold April evening in 2001

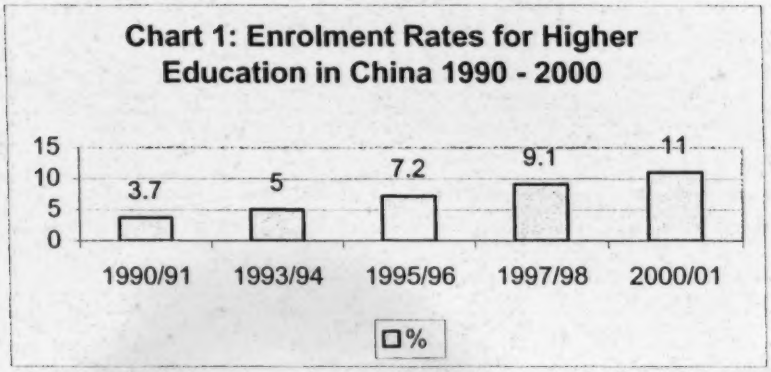
and listening to her talk, I wondered why more than two thirds of them had decided NOT to return to China and to remain in their host countries.

Since the Chinese government adopted its "open door" policy in 1978, hundreds of thousands of Chinese students have come overseas to further their education. Within the first decade, between 1978 and 1987, the Chinese government funded 46,000 "students and researchers in science, engineering, agriculture, and medicine and other subjects useful in mainland China's quest for modernization" (Borthwick, 1990, p. 389). Those students came to the West to seek the most advanced technology and science in order to modernize China as quickly as possible in four areas: industry, agriculture, national defense and science and technology, the so-called four modernizations (Crawford, 1989). They came as visiting scholars on a one-year or two-year short-term basis. The majority of them were males. They were married and held senior positions in their working units in China. Most of them suffered from severe "culture shock" (Oberg, 1960) when they came overseas since China was a closed society then. They tended to withdraw from the host society and stick together mainly because they assumed that they would return to China after one year or two to "serve their motherland" (Feng, 1991). However, by mid 1980s, more people went abroad and fewer of them wanted to come back. For various reasons, many of them did not return to China. By 1987, only about 20,000 out of 50,000 scholars and students who went abroad for non-degree-oriented studies had returned to mainland China (Young, 1990, p. 405).

Although there were still a large number of government-funded students studying abroad, the second decade, beginning in the late 1980s, saw more and more students go overseas to study at their own expense. In the United States alone, in 1988 there were

25,000 mainland Chinese students (Borthwick, 1990, p. 390). The majority of them were pursuing postgraduate degrees. Both government and privately funded students had to find part time jobs in restaurants or gas stations in order to support themselves and their studies (Wu, 1993). Life was very hard for them as the economic situation was not very good and it was very difficult to find jobs then. However, they survived and many remained in their host countries upon completion of their studies, regardless of the sources of their funding. Eventually, the majority of them applied for permanent residency and settled down in their host countries.

In the mid-1990s, with China undergoing educational reforms at all levels, it became clear that free access to higher education after obtaining a very high score on the National College Entrance Examination would no longer be possible in China. What's more, there were too few spaces available at Chinese universities to allow the majority of high school graduates to access higher education. According to Beijing University's Professor *Ke-Ming Hao* (2001), who lectured at the Curriculum and Pedagogy Institute, only 11 % of Chinese young people between 18 to 24 years of age, about 11 million, were able to go to university or college in 2000. The Ministry of Education has striven to increase the enrolment rates since 1990 (See chart 1) and to ensure that the enrolment rate in higher education attains the goal of 15% in 2005 and 20% in 2010 (Hao, 2001). Millions of students in China still cannot go to university to further their education. Because of this fierce competition for limited spaces, it has become more and more difficult to get into first-rate universities in China. Not satisfied to settle for the second- or third-rate ones, some affluent parents turned their attention to foreign universities in



order to help their only child, who was born around 1980 when the Chinese government first adopted the "one family, one child" policy to control the large population. In addition to earning a highly marketable foreign degree, they wanted their children to master the English language, a language they believed would give them more and better job opportunities in the future global economy. These parents had the financial resources and were willing to pay for their only child's education as long as it would give them a better future.

With this latest trend of younger students studying abroad, North America has become a choice educational destination. Because of Canada's reputation for cleanliness, safety, a relatively low cost of living and high quality university education, more and more young Chinese students was/will continue coming to Canada to further their post-secondary education. Among this youngest group of students, very few of them had/will have the experience of leaving home and living on their own. Pulling up roots, coming to a new city in a new country to study and live all by themselves was/will be a huge transition for these young people. It was/will be a journey fraught with pain, anxiety, uncertainty and struggles in the early years. However, with time, patience and

perseverance some of them learned/will learn to survive and thrive in their new environment as the stories in my master's thesis show (Li, 2001).

As China is undergoing profound restructuring in almost all aspects of its society, the unemployment rate remains high. Many young university graduates cannot find jobs upon graduation. As an alternative, some of them seek to go overseas to further their education. The "going abroad fever" is not over yet. On the contrary, more and more high school students will choose to come overseas for their first university degrees in the near future. How to help those students make sense of their lives in a new language and in a new country and succeed in their studies in North America in the beginning stages was the thesis I explored in my master's research (Li, 2001). I found that during this transitional period, these younger students had to learn how to deal with financial concerns, stress of decision-making, and academic difficulties. They needed to learn how to cook their own meals, and to decide where to live, where to buy food or clothing. They had to consider whether to buy a bus pass or not and whether to work part time or not in order to earn enough money for their tuition and daily living. They had to learn how to study in a strange education system, where English, a foreign language to them, was the medium of instruction. They had to learn how to choose majors and develop their own programs of studies, how to use computers to access the internet and to do word processing, how to change their study habits and manage their time more efficiently, how to deal with a different professor-student relationship and how to maintain a high enough GPA (Grade Point Average) so that they would not have problems renewing their student visas. The stress and the burden of living in a strange language and in a strange place was so much that they were content if they could survive each school day and pass their

exams without becoming sick. However, with time, the issue of "Where is home?" began to surface, especially after Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* returned home and found that they no longer wanted to live in their hometowns for the rest of their lives. Where would their future homes be? What did "home" mean to them now after they had lived in Canada for four years? They were expected to graduate in the spring of 2003. How would they make a home in Canada if they chose to stay here? What would enable them to feel at home again in China if they decided to return?

Coming to Canada: International Students from China, 1980 - 2002

> Pico Iyer (2000) called the 20th century
>
> the century of movement, with planes and phones and even newer toys precipitating what the secretary-general of the UN's Habitat II conference in 1996 called the "largest migration in history"; suddenly, among individuals and among groups, more bodies were being thrown more widely across the planet than ever before (p. 10).

The 21st century continues this trend. People around the world move, or are forced to move, from village to town, town to city, city to city, and country to country for economic, social, educational, religious and political reasons. Among the new migrants, international students[5] are a group of people who voluntarily uproot and displace themselves in order to pursue their educational goals in foreign countries because they often cannot find such opportunities for education at home. Many of them move from a third-world developing country, i.e. China, to a western industrialized developed country, i.e. Canada.

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[5] The terms *international students* and *foreign students* are used interchangeably throughout this dissertation. They both refer to foreign nationals who come to Canada primarily to attend educational institutions at all levels on student authorizations (CIC, 2003, January).

According to a research report, *Foreign Students in Canada 1980 – 2001* by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC, 2003, January),

> Canada has experienced unprecedented growth in the number of foreign students in recent years. At the end of 2001, there were over 130,000 foreign students in Canada, rising from almost 57,000 in 1990 and 37,000 in 1980.

Among top source countries, the report highlighted that China had the distinction of being the fastest growing principal source country of foreign students to Canada in recent years (1998 – 2001) (See table 1). In the early years (1980 – 1985), there were fewer than 900 international students from China studying in Canada (stocks). The majority of them were one- or two-year short-term visiting scholars, who were male, married, and working in the fields of sciences and technology. They were chosen and sent overseas by the government to learn the most advanced developments in those fields in order to help modernize China quickly. They were supported financially by the government and most of them returned to China at the end of their study. Between 1986 and 1997, the number fluctuated ranging from around 1,000 to 2,400 students a year (See table 1). During this period, more and more privately funded students came to Canada to do their graduate degrees. After the Tiananmen Square Massacre on June 4, 1989, many students decided to stay in Canada upon completion of their study. It was during this period, especially after mid 1990s, that the Canadian government started to change their immigration policies regarding international students. It was much easier for international students to get study permits than it was in the 1980s and early 1990s (Chacon, 1999; Sheh, 1994). As a matter of fact, two of my research participants, Jasmine and *Mei* were issued a three-year study permit each in 2000 so that they did not have to renew it before they

Table 1: Foreign student Flows and Stocks from China: 1980 – 2001				
Year	**Flows[6]**	**% of flows**	**Stocks[7]**	**% of stocks**
1980	215	1.0	287	0.8
1981	317	1.2	481	1.1
1982	213	0.9	504	1.0
1983	386	2.0	646	1.4
1984	384	2.2	746	1.8
1985	554	3.0	815	2.1
1986	597	3.0	1,052	2.8
1987	550	2.4	1,167	3.1
1988	911	3.3	1,623	3.8
1989	**965**	**3.5**	**2,007**	**4.1**
1990	872	2.8	1,740	3.1
1991	1,038	3.4	1,620	2.6
1992	940	3.2	2,070	3.2
1993	810	2.9	2,405	3.7
1994	749	2.7	2,122	3.5
1995	879	2.7	1,730	2.7
1996	1,167	2.9	2,023	2.8
1997	1,019	2.4	2,152	2.8
1998	**1,829**	**4.4**	**3,062**	**3.9**
1999	**4,025**	**7.7**	**5,902**	**6.6**
2000	**6,436**	**10.1**	**10,576**	**9.8**
2001	**11,138**	**15.1**	**20,160**	**15.2**

graduated from university. As a result of deliberate marketing strategies of many Canadian post-secondary institutions, a large influx of international students will continue to come to Canada to further their education. The annual flows statistics for

[6] Flows – Based on the initial entry method, the number of persons identified as foreign students entering the CIC system (and presumably the country) for the first time. This is calculated based on the earliest effective date of any valid permit issued to a foreign student (CIC, 2003, January).

[7] Stocks – The number of persons, identified as foreign students, present in the CIC system on December 1st in each year of observation. Any foreign student who has been granted landed status on or before the observation date is excluded from the stock count from that date on (CIC, 2003, January).

1998, 1999, 2000, and 2001 for initial entries of foreign students showed a great increase in the number of students from China. In 1998, China was ranked the seventh among the top ten principal countries of origin for foreign students with only 1,829 students (4.4% of the total foreign student population) while Japan, U.S.A., South Korea, France, Mexico and Taiwan were the top six countries. There were 5,520 Japanese students and 1,945 Taiwanese students in that year (CIC, 2001, September). In 1999, China rose to the fourth with 4,025 students (7.7% of the total foreign student population) following South Korea (6,496 students, 12.5%), Japan (5,778 students, 11.1%) and United States (4,595 students, 8.8%) (CIC, 2002, August). Since the year 2000, China has become the second principal country of origin for foreign students with 6,436 students in 2000 (10.1%) and 11,138 students in 2001 (15.1%). At the end of 2001, there were more than 20,000 Chinese international students studying in Canada and China became the largest source country of stocks (15%). The number of South Korean students remained the largest with 10,881 in 2000 (17.1%), and 13,479 in 2001 (18.2%) (CIC, 2002, August) respectively.

The University of Alberta also saw a sharp increase in the number of international students from China in recent years (1998 - 2002) (see table 2). There were only 14

Table 2: U of A Full-time Chinese International Students 1998-2002

Academic Year	# of undergraduate students	# of graduate students	Total # of Chinese students	% of total international students
1998/99	14	133	147	14
1999/00	28	120	148	13
2000/01	53	131	184	15
2001/02	65	190	255	18
2002/03	147	248	395	25

undergraduate students and 133 graduate students from China in the academic year 1998/1999 (14% of the total international student population) while in 2002/03, the number of undergraduate students jumped to 147 and the number of graduate students rose to 248, making Chinese international students a very strong presence on the U of A campus (one out of four international students was from China). (International Centre, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002 & 2003).

There are several factors that have contributed to this sudden increase of international students from China:

- In the 1990s, China experienced strong economic growth, which increased the possibility of study abroad;
- There is only one child in a family, which makes it possible for parents to send him/her to study abroad;
- Chinese parents think highly of the quality and reputation of a foreign degree;
- English language is the language of instruction;
- There is very limited opportunity for university study in China;
- Canadian educational institutions initiated marketing strategies to compete internationally in attracting international students (e.g. Canada established Canadian Education Centres in 17 countries, which included one in Beijing in the mid 1990s);
- Canada increased staffing levels at the Beijing Mission to deal with a backlog of student applications;
- Some provinces entered into agreements with other countries to attract international students. For example, Quebec signed an agreement with China, which allowed a

limited number of Chinese students to study in that province without paying foreign tuition fees;

- After 9/11, the United States tightened its immigration policy regarding international students so many Chinese students came to Canada to study instead.

With recent initiatives of the federal government to promote Canada as a "destination of choice for international students", more and more international students will continue coming to Canada to further their post-secondary education. Although my study focuses on one particular group of international students, i.e. the Chinese students, it has much broader implications for international education and immigrant education in general because it deals with home and homelessness -- a modern human condition -- and seeks to understand and find "ways to belong in the world and thus to become more fully ourselves" (Mugerauer, 1994, p. 153) and to have a more meaningful existence.

* * *

Since the open door policy in 1978, hundreds of thousands of students have flowed out of China and into the western countries. According to a Survey of the Educational Reform and Development in China (Ministry of Education, 2004), between 1982 and 2002, 450,000 Chinese students have been sent to 103 countries and regions, among which 160,000 have returned after completions of their studies and researches. Although the return rate of Chinese students is much higher than that of salmon, I continue to wonder why the majority of students have decided to remain "in the ocean" and to make their homes there…

I like your salmon story. It is a more narrative way of thinking about and understanding the students' experiences (Jean Clandinin, at my Candidacy Exam, November 28, 2002).

Chapter Three

Narrative Inquiry as the Research Methodology

Journal Entry: October 2005, Edmonton

Why Narrative Inquiry?

In my master's thesis, *A Narrative Inquiry of Intercultural and Academic Transitional Experiences of Four Female Chinese Students* (Li, 2001), I used narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) to examine the transitional experiences of four Chinese students. I explored their experiences moving from a Chinese high school to a Canadian high school and later from the Canadian high school to a Canadian university. This research allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of my own experience as well as that of many others in similar situations. It also led me to think about the experience of "culture shock" (Oberg, 1960) in a more narrative way (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). By living alongside my research participants, attending to and making sense of their lives as lived during their first year as university students, I was able to understand how these four international students from China lived out their lives of transition in a foreign language, a strange education system and a new place. Through telling and retelling (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 189) our stories to one another over time, we were able to see our first year experiences in Canada in a different way. We started to understand

why we had lost our self-confidence and self esteem and had so many negative experiences. We also realized that our situations were not unique and that everybody might go through a similar process when they moved from China to Canada. This insight gave us the courage and perseverance we needed to meet the daily challenges we faced as ESL students in a Canadian university. Through this research, I came to see the transformative potential of doing narrative inquiry and became more convinced that narrative inquiry is the best way to understand and to study experience.

As time went by, my research participants learned to respond to different situations in both their lives and studies with more ease. And they became more and more comfortable living in Canada and studying in a Canadian university. Then as coincidence would have it, three of them – Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* -- went home for a visit. After returning to Canada, the notion of home and homelessness began to surface because they realized that they no longer wanted to return to their old homes in China and spend the rest of their lives there. Where are their homes, then? What is home for them?

Narrative Inquiry

In an interview with Dave Bronstetter, the host of CBC Radio Montreal's morning show *Daybreak*, Thomas King (2003) said the following about his 2003 Massey lectures entitled *The truth about stories: A native narrative*:

> Stories are all we are. That's it. Nothing more. Stories. If we don't have the stories we told about each other and people told about us, I don't know what would it be. I live my life through stories. If you really think about who you are, it's the stories your parents tell about you, your friends tell about you, that you tell about the world. It is really through stories we share our existence, not just our identity. I

> can't imagine myself as an entity without running into stories. If someone says who are you, I tell him a story (King, 2003).

"People by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 416). Narrative inquirers are interested in people's lived experiences. We seek to understand the storied lives we and our research participants lead on storied landscapes (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 4) within a temporal space. "Experience is what we study, and we study it narratively because narrative thinking is a key form of experience and a key way of writing and thinking about it" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 18). "Life and narrative are inextricably connected. Life both anticipates telling and draws meaning from it. Narrative is both about living and part of it" (Ellis & Bochner, 2003, p. 220). As narrative researchers, we describe the storied lives both we and our participants lead, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of these experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 416). The purpose of a narrative inquiry is to create "a new sense of meaning and significance with respect to the research topic" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 42).

> Stories are powerful research tools. They provided us with a picture of real people in real situations, struggling with real problems… They invite us to speculate on what might be changed and with what effect…. Most important, they invite us to remember that we are in the business of teaching, learning and researching to improve the human condition. (Noddings & Witherall, 1991, p. 280)

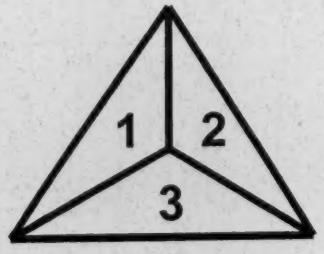
As a narrative inquirer, I want a "more personal, collaborative, and interactive relationship" (Ellis & Bochner, 2003, p. 217) with my participants. I want Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* to tell their stories in their own terms. I want my research to make a difference in their young lives. I want their voices and stories to be heard.

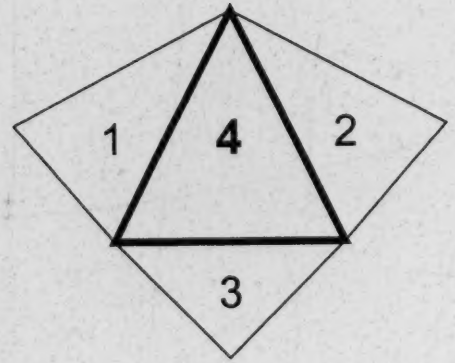
Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) research framework, "the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space" (p. 49), helps me to think about how to attend to the lives of my

participants as a researcher, how to conduct and move my inquiry forward, and how I position myself in this inquiry.

This metaphorical three-dimensional inquiry space is defined by "temporality along one dimension, the personal and the social along a second dimension, and place along a third" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50) (See Figure 1). The temporal dimension refers to the past, present and future. It allowed my research participants and myself to travel backward to our lives in China before coming to Canada and forward to our future lives that we envision for ourselves while attending to our present lives during the research process. The personal and social dimension has inward and outward directions. Inward is related to "the internal conditions, such as feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions and so on" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 417). Outward refers to "the existential conditions, that is, the environment" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 417). As a researcher, I attended to both the internal and the existential conditions of my participants as well as myself within the inquiry. The personal and social dimension allowed me to attend to my participants' internal conditions, that is, their feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions, as well as to what was happening in their environments (for example, the "going abroad fever") as they moved in time and from place to place. The third dimension of place refers to "the specific concrete physical and topological boundaries of inquiry space" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 51). This allowed me to attend to the specific places in which my participants lived. Our storied lives, mine and my participants', are always situated in specific places or sequences of places.

Figure 1: Three-Dimensional Narrative Inquiry Space





- **1 Temporality**
  - Past, Present, Future
  - Backward, Forward
- **2 Personal & Social**
  - Inward, Outward
- **3 Places**
- **4 Researcher & Participants Interaction Space**
  - Story-living
  - Story-telling
  - Story-retelling

Situating myself as a researcher with my participants within this metaphorical three-dimensional inquiry space allowed me to think about and to attend to all these three dimensions all at once and to make meaning in the living, telling and retelling of stories during the inquiry. Within this inquiry space, there was the telling of Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei*'s lived stories of what had happened in their lives, which included all the field texts created during the research process. Sometimes there was a living alongside. There was also the retelling of their stories I did when I engaged in the inquiry, trying to work with all the field texts, the telling of their lived stories. At any moment during the inquiry I was there within this inquiry space, allowing me to give the participants and myself the space to move backward and forward, inward and outward in our exploration of the meanings and experiences of home for us as international students.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) observe that narrative inquiry is "always strongly autobiographical. Our research interests come out of our own narratives of experience and shape our narrative inquiry plot lines" (p. 121). For me, it was my English teaching and learning background in China, my own experience as a new immigrant to Canada and later my experience as a graduate student pursuing advanced degrees in Canadian academia that eventually led me to this narrative study. I wanted to understand and make sense of my own chaotic and traumatic experiences of moving my home to Canada from China. I wanted to know that I was not alone. However, as a narrative researcher, I needed to see myself as "in the middle of a nested set of stories" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 63), and to understand my location as researcher within the narrative inquiry. On the one hand, I needed to tell stories of myself as a Chinese graduate student in a Canadian university and as a new immigrant looking for a permanent home in Canada.

On the other hand, I needed to guard against what I thought I already knew about what Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* would say about the research topic. "Because we are uniquely different beings, with different pasts and different fears, our situations are never identical, no matter how alike they seem from the outside" (Noddings, 2003, p. 40). I worked to listen to their stories on their own terms instead of listening for what they said that would fit into what I thought I already knew. I used a more personal, interactive and collaborative approach to engage in the research conversations with my participants. I attended to the participants' stories of their lived experiences and ensured that the sharing of my stories was in response to their experiences. Thus, I tried not to shape the direction of the conversations, but rather, allowed Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* to take the lead. Because I was positioned differently on this storied landscape, my experiences were different from the research participants' experiences. It was their experiences and understandings of home I sought to understand.

Conducting Narrative Inquiry with Three Chinese Students

This doctoral study was a narrative inquiry into the international students' experiences and understandings of home and homelessness. It was a collaborative meaning-making process among Jasmine, Magnolia, *Mei* and me – the researcher[8]. It took place in the midst of four lives over a period of three years. I started this inquiry by composing my narrative beginnings as a graduate student from China and a new

[8] The fact that I am female and share the same Chinese language and culture with my research participants enriched the whole research process.

immigrant in Canada. Working "within the three-dimensional space, telling stories of our past that frame our present standpoint, moving back and forth from the personal to the social, and situating it all in place" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 70), I wrote this narrative in order to locate myself in the stories I was telling and living when I began my research journey. In this way, I became more aware of my place in the inquiry plotline.

November 2002, Edmonton

Gaining Entry

> Access and entry are sensitive components in qualitative research, and the researcher must establish trust, rapport, and authentic communication patterns with participants. By establishing trust and rapport at the beginning of the study, the researcher is better able to capture the nuance and meaning of each participant's life from the participant's point of view. This also ensures that participants will be more willing to share everything, warts and all, with the researcher. Maintaining trust and rapport continues through the length of the study and long after, in fact.
>
> (Janesick, 1994. p. 211)

By the time I started this research project in November 2002, Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* had already started their fourth year, the last year of their undergraduate degree programs, in a Canadian university. We had been friends for almost four years. This friendship-based research relationship played a very important part in the whole research process. We e-mailed one another regularly. Sometimes we went shopping together, for example, when they needed a car to help them carry a big bag of rice. At other times we cooked and ate together. If we had time we went to the gym to do some exercises together. We loved talking in Chinese, sharing stories of our present studies and lives in Canada, and our dreams and hopes of a brighter and better future. Thus, we had already engaged in living and telling stories of ourselves when I began my research project with

my participants. In June 2003, Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* graduated from their undergraduate programs. Later in September, Jasmine moved to another university in another city in western Canada to study for her second degree in Electrical Engineering while Magnolia and *Mei* stayed on to pursue their master's degrees in finance at the University of Alberta.

Janesick (1994) emphasizes the human and passionate elements of research:

> Becoming immersed in a study requires passion: passion for people, passion for communication, and passion for understanding people. This is the contribution of qualitative research, and it can only enhance educational and human services practice. (p. 217)

Having been a university English teacher for 10 years in Shanghai, China, I knew this age group of students very well. I knew how difficult it was for many of them to leave small-town homes for the first time and come to live on their own in the biggest city in China. During their two-year study with me at the Foreign Languages Department at *Tong Ji* University in Shanghai, I not only helped them with English, but also with their lives. I often visited their dormitories and listened to their stories. Some of them also came to me for their puzzles over love and life. Young and single at that time, I knew no better than they did. But I had the time and patience, curiosity and desire to listen and to understand.

Coming to Canada to start my graduate programs, I knew how difficult it was for me to make the transition into a different linguistic, cultural and educational milieu. I could easily imagine how much more difficult it would be for these students when they came to Canada. I wanted to help Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei*. I wanted to understand their journeys between two languages and cultures. I wanted to understand how they

came to terms with who they were in the space in-between. I wanted to give them the space to tell their stories. I wanted their voices to be heard so that Canadian educational institutions could improve their practices when they recruited more and more international students.

However, passion alone could not guarantee my entry into my research site. The facts that Jasmine, Magnolia, *Mei*, and I share the same Chinese language and culture and that we all moved from China to Canada for further studies in 1998 and that we were all puzzling over where our future homes would be made me an "insider" of their situations. This enabled me to see what they saw, to feel what they felt and to understand why they did what they did moment by moment when I was in the field, creating field texts (data).

November 2002 - April 2003, Edmonton

Creating Field texts - Data Collection

According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), field texts, the data of narrative inquiry, were "created, neither found nor discovered, by participants and researchers in order to represent aspects of field experience" (ibid. p. 92). In my research study, I created the following kinds of field texts: autobiographical writing, conversations, journal entries and e-mail messages.

Autobiographical writing as field text. According to Olney (1972),

> ...autobiography is the literature that most immediately and deeply engages our interest and holds it and that in the end seems to mean the most to us because it brings an increased awareness, through an understanding of another life in another time and place of the nature of our own selves and our share in the human condition. (p. 7)

"Autobiographical writing is a way to write about the whole context of a life" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 101). Through reading my stories, even though only selected pieces of my life experience are included, readers will learn something about my life as a new immigrant, something about my life as a graduate student in Canada and the challenges of living a life in between.

I wrote an autobiography entitled *Who is the one who is researching?* for Dr. David Smith's doctoral student seminar when I started my doctoral program in the fall of 2000. In that not-so-short piece of writing, I tried to trace the different segments in my past that had led me to my current location as a researcher, a teacher educator, an English teacher, a graduate student, a mother, a wife, a daughter, a sister and above all as a human being. I shared that piece of writing with Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* over the Christmas holiday of 2002 and invited them to do some autobiographical writing if they had the time. Magnolia and *Mei* did, but Jasmine did not because she went back to China and did not have the time. Although I told them that they could write either in Chinese or in English or both, Magnolia and *Mei* ended up writing in English and asked me to "correct all the mistakes" in their writings because they wanted to save "all their memories of childhood in China written in English for the first time" onto a disc. Thanks to computer technology, we were able to do that by sending those documents as email attachments back and forth until we were all satisfied with our writing. This writing allowed Magnolia, *Mei* and me to move backward and forward, inward and outward on our different storied landscapes of growing up in China and coming to Canada to study and experiencing home in different ways.

Conversations as field text. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) note that "conversations are marked by equality among participants and by flexibility to allow participants to establish forms and topics appropriate to their group inquiry" (p. 108). Because of the nature of my research questions, on-going conversations with my participants played a very significant part in the data collection process. Whether it was a one-on-one conversation or a group conversation, I knew where we would start, but I had no idea where our conversations would end. I wanted to give that openness to all of our conversations so that Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* felt comfortable leading the conversations and sharing stories that were most important to them.

On November 29, 2002, I met Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* for two hours in Kiva Room in the Education Building and had our first group conversation. Magnolia and I accidentally found this room when we were trying to find a quiet place for lunch and conversation a year before. The room was carpeted and small and soundproof. There was no furniture in it. We just sat down on the carpet and leaned our backs against the wall and shared our stories in Mandarin Chinese. This time the four of us sat in a circle as we talked. I told Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* that I wanted to explore what were their understandings of home at this particular point in their lives. I used Allen Say's picture storybook *Grandfather's Journey* (Say, 1993) to start our conversation. In Say's book he describes his grandfather's journey from Japan to America which he later also undertakes as a young man, and their feelings of being torn by a love for two different countries. I tape-recorded the conversation and later transcribed it in Chinese. I also planned another group conversation towards the end of my data collection in April 2003 to see if their

understandings had changed over time, but they became really busy and we did not meet again for a group conversation.

In addition to the group conversation, between November 2002 and April 2003, I also met with Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* one-on-one for 45 minutes to 90 minutes three times each. All the conversations were in Mandarin Chinese and were tape-recorded and later transcribed in Chinese.

I used a Chinese word processor *Chinese Star 2001* to transcribe my first conversation with Magnolia on November 8, 2002. It took me about 20 hours to transcribe that 90-minute conversation! This was too slow and too time-consuming so I decided to get rid of this technology and use my own hand. When I transcribed my first 45-minute-long conversation with Jasmine in handwritten form, using a 27.5 x 21.6cm 32-page exercise book, it took me only 6 hours to fill all those 11 pages. I could save 4 hours without using the computer! In addition, it felt good to write so much Chinese with my own hand! I decided to do the rest of the transcribing in the same manner. I did NOT translate those Chinese transcriptions into English because I did not want my translation/interpretation to interfere with the shape of their stories or responses. Since the topic of "home" was so close to our hearts and emotions, I believed it was essential to give Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* the opportunity to express their innermost feelings and thoughts freely and without effort in their mother tongue.

Then, I made a photocopy of each transcription and gave them back to Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* for their feedback. I asked them to feel free to add, delete, change or comment on the transcription. I then made the necessary changes. I read the Chinese transcriptions and their Chinese responses carefully and wrote down some points or

questions that I would like to ask them before I met each of them for the next research conversation.

Within these conversations, I explored with Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* their memories of their experiences of home in China and their reflections of their experiences of several temporary homes in Canada. I invited them to describe, in detail, the different homes they had as they grew up in China and came to study in Canada, and to explain the feelings and emotions different homes evoked in them. I wanted to know how and what Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* felt about their homes in China and Canada and what made them feel at home in all those different places. I encouraged them to draw diagrams to show me the special places in their stories as they moved inward, outward, forward and backward on their storied landscapes, talking about their experiences of homes in both China and Canada.

Journal writing as field text. Cooper (1991) says that keeping a journal makes it possible for us "to examine our own experiences, to gain a fresh perspective, and by that means begin to transform the experiences themselves" (p. 99). I have kept journals for many years as a reflection on my life as a daughter, a student, a teacher, a wife, a mother in China, as a landed immigrant, a graduate student, a teacher educator and a researcher in Canada. Journalling has helped me to better understand myself as a human being.

I kept a research journal throughout this study. Whenever I felt the need to write about my thoughts, feelings, questions, and reactions after interviewing or talking with my participants, I went to my notebook to write them down. This writing served "as a form of intense self-reflection" (Cooper, 1991, p. 110). It helped me to clarify my

thinking, to gain some insights into my own situation as well as that of my participants and to move my research ahead or at times slow it down.

When I realized, very soon, that the transcribing of the Chinese conversations took much longer than I had expected, I decided to slow down my research:

> I just finished my second conversation with *Mei* today and I feel exhausted. For the past two weeks, all I did was to sit in front of a tape-recorder to transcribe our first round of conversations. My right hand is really sore now...
>
> I wonder if I should have bought that *Chinese Star 2001*. I bought the original software for an original price, almost $ 200 Canadian dollars! But it's useless to me! It's so slow for me to type these Chinese characters one by one. The first transcribing took me 20 hours! I can't afford to do that for the rest of my research. I hand wrote my second transcribing. And I can save about 4 hours for each 45-minute-long conversation if I write with my own hand. Gee, my hand is faster than my computer!
>
> I told Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* that I wanted to meet with them individually once a week for research conversations. They all agreed and we scheduled our times for the first two weeks. Maybe I was too eager and too excited about my research...
>
> Now I realize that the transcribing takes more time than I have expected. I feel rushed in order to finish the transcriptions before our second meetings. This is too much for me. I need to slow down. I will take a short break after our first group conversation next Friday... Besides, they also need time to concentrate on their studies to prepare for their final exams...
>
> (Lisa, Journal entry, Nov. 20, 2002)

Recognizing the power of journal writing, I invited Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* also to keep a journal during the research process. During my first group conversation with Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* in November 2002, I gave them each a blank 72-page half plain and half lined exercise book. I asked them to write down any experiences, ideas, feelings, and thoughts that might come to them during the following six months. I also told them that they could write either in English or in Chinese or in both. Jasmine wrote 11 journal entries: only one was written in English and the others were all written

in Chinese. Magnolia wrote six journal entries: only the first one was written in English and the other five pieces were written in Chinese. *Mei* wrote five journal entries: one in Chinese, another half English and half Chinese and the other three in English.

I also invited Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* to bring their journals back to me if they wanted me to respond to any of their writings. Each of them did so only once during the six months. I responded to the first seven of Jasmine's 11 entries, the first one of Magnolia's six entries, and the first three of *Mei*'s five entries. Within these journal entries, Jasmine and Magnolia wrote about their experiences, thoughts and feelings of home while *Mei* chose to write her response to some of the English proverbs on "home" and some pieces of my writing that I shared with them during the research. Keeping research journals allowed Jasmine, Magnolia, *Mei* and me to record the existential conditions of what we were doing, "situating them in a place, at a certain time, with details of particular events noted" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 103). It also allowed us to turn inward to describe our feelings, hopes, fears, and other inner responses, and at times, to puzzle out our experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 103) on the storied landscape of home.

E-mail messages as field text. For me, e-mail messages are letters without envelopes or stamps. Jasmine, Magnolia, *Mei* and I have kept e-mail exchanges with one another all the time since we first met more than four years ago. We have used the emails to arrange for a meeting place and time, to send documents back and forth, and to give one another advice or information or encouragement from time to time. Emailing has become a very efficient way of communication among and between us. During the

research process, I printed out all the e-mail messages on hard copies, sorted them out and put them into Jasmine's, Magnolia's, *Mei's* and my own e-mail files.

Composing field texts is one way of telling and living, retelling and reliving a life story, which helps the researcher as well as the participants make meaning from those stories. As I composed different kinds of field texts and positioned them within the three-dimensional space, I began the process of understanding my research puzzle.

November 2002 – December 2004, Edmonton

From Field Texts to Research Texts - Data Analysis and Interpretation

After all field texts were collected/created and sorted by type (Autobiographical writing, Personal journal, E-mail messages, Conversation transcripts), I rearranged them by person into three piles (Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei*). I spent many hours reading and rereading them in order to construct interim texts – chronicled accounts – about their experiences of home in China and in Canada in English for initial analysis. I used headings *Homes in China* and *Homes in Canada* and subheadings *First Home, Second Home...* to help me organize the huge number of field texts into meaningful chunks. I wrote the narrative account of one participant at a time. Therefore, I had Jasmine hours, Magnolia days or *Mei* weeks depending on the flow of my writing. I finished the three narrative accounts at the end of March 2004. These narrative accounts then were shared with Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* individually first in the form of email attachments to make sure that my understandings and representations were respectful of them and accurate. This sharing usually generated further field texts. Based on their written

response, I revised those accounts and then sent them back again for response. In the middle of reading and revising Magnolia's narrative account, I started to look for "the patterns, narrative threads, tensions, and themes" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 132) within her stories. I chose what stood out for me the most in each one of her stories and gave that story a title. So instead of *First Home, Second Home…* Magnolia's stories became *My first home: A room on a balcony, My second home: I was an alarm clock…* I did this new layer of analysis and interpretation with Jasmine and *Mei*'s stories in the same way. This process helped to deepen my understanding in the inquiry. I sent these newly revised narrative accounts to Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* for further response. When they were satisfied with my re-presentation of their individual stories, I sent them each an electronic copy of all the stories I co-constructed with each one of them so that they had the opportunity to read one another's stories and respond to them. They each read all these stories with great interest because their life experiences had been quite different from one another, growing up in China. This "member check" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314) technique was crucial for establishing the credibility and validity of my final research text. More importantly, it allowed me, the researcher, to co-construct meaning with my participants from our shared research experience and to honour and respect their voices.

January 2005 - October 2005, Edmonton

Creating Research Texts

I struggled for a long time trying to find the "right" format to re-present Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei*'s narratives of experiences in my final research text. I remembered

the tension I had experienced when I was reconstructing Jasmine's stories, which did not have a sense of flow or completeness as *Mei*'s or Magnolia's stories did. Because Jasmine did not do her autobiographical writing, there were many gaps in my reconstructions of her life experiences. After reading all the three stories as email attachments the first time in July 2004, Jasmine, who then lived in another city in another province, sent me an email, saying that she felt her story was incomplete and was just "bits and pieces put together" compared with Magnolia and *Mei*'s stories and that she wanted to "add more content" to her story to make it complete. However, Jasmine never got back to me with additional content to her story. So her story remained as "bits and pieces put together". And I was stuck. I had no idea how I should move my writing ahead.

Then I had a dream on Thursday, February 3, 2005. I could not remember what was actually in the dream when I woke up the next morning, but the phrase "bits and pieces" stayed in my mind. I wondered what it meant and what it was telling me for the next several days. On February 8, at Research Issues at CRTED, I was very excited to tell my friends around the big kitchen table that I knew exactly how to structure the rest of my dissertation! I would write it in "bits and pieces", I told them. I would write it in journal format because it would allow me to continue my conversations with my participants and to remain in relation with them. It would allow me and my participants to look backward and forward, inward and outward, and to situate all of our experiences within place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 140) over a period of three years in our lives.

Once I decided on the journal format, I was able to start my writing again. It took me March and April to write Magnolia's chapter. As soon as I finished one journal entry Magnolia and I would meet and read my writing together. She would give me her comments and thoughts. I then went back and made the changes. We did this piece by piece until all the six pieces in her chapter were done. It took me May to do the same thing with *Mei*'s chapter and June with Jasmine's chapter.

In the following three chapters, I used journal entries to retell Magnolia, *Mei* and Jasmine's stories, interspersing my reflection in between to show how their stories helped me to understand my research puzzle. I used different fonts to bring different voices into the text: Verdana font for Magnolia's stories, Arial font for *Mei*'s stories, Courier New font for Jasmine's stories, regular "Times New Roman" for what I interpret as having happened and my reflective thoughts, connecting the stories with words of other authors.

In the pages to come, I retell the many of the stories Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* shared with me during this inquiry. These stories will take the reader, you, to far-away places and distant times in China as well as to their present homes in Canada. These stories will tell you what was home for them at this particular point in their lives…

* * *

When I watched the Chinook salmon going home upstream in the water, they were constantly moving. Sometimes I could see them; sometimes they were hidden behind the rocks or under the white water. At any one moment I could only see a glimpse of them, the bits and pieces of the whole fish.

As a narrative inquirer, I was "learning to think narratively, to attend to lives as lived narratively" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 120) and to position my inquiry at this point in time, in this particular context and with this group of students. I knew that our stories, theirs and mine, may change over time because "[n]arrative truth seeks to keep the past alive in the present. Stories show us that the meanings and significance of the past are incomplete, tentative, and revisable according to contingencies of our present life circumstances, the present from which we narrate" (Ellis & Bochner, 2003, p. 219). Thus, what you are going to read in the following pages is only one of the many tellings we do at this moment in our lives, a glimpse of our lives so far…

我想我会同 salmon 一样，回家的。我想我只是归国人潮中的一个。在从海水到淡水的过程中，我也会有挣扎，会有考验，或许还会有恐惧。但我不怕，因为我回到家了。
人的一生要比 salmon 长很多。水到渠成的时候，走与留，来与去，或许就不会是一个棘手的问题了。我希望会有那么一天。[9]

(Magnolia, Response to Prologue, January 27, 2004)

Chapter Four Magnolia

Where to go next?

Journal Entry: November 8, 2002, Edmonton

This afternoon Magnolia and I met in the Kiva Room for our first research conversation for one and a half hours. I just finished my last class for the IPT (Introductory Professional Term) ESL minors course with a colleague yesterday morning. It was the first time I had taught in a Canadian university. I was very nervous and was not always sure if I was doing a good job. I found myself with no time to do other things

[9] English translation: I think I will return home, just like salmon. I will be only one of tens of thousands of returnees. On my journey home from the ocean to the fresh water, I will have struggles, hesitations, and perhaps fears. But I won't be afraid because I am home.
People's lives are much longer than that of salmon. When the time comes, to return or to stay, to go or to come, may not be a difficult question. I hope that day will come...

for the past two months because there was always one more thing to prepare for my class! I was REALLY happy that finally I could start my research!

Earlier this term Magnolia sent me an email message, telling me that she was anxious about where to go and what to do next after the completion of her undergraduate program:

> I only take four courses this term because I get eight courses left this year. Although my schedule is quite flexible this term, I feel so much pressure because I am always wondering where I can go next year. I am not sure whether I should go to graduate school or find a job. Now I am preparing my resume and for GMAT, which is really hard I find.
>
> (Magnolia, e-mail messages, September 23, 2002)

So I was thrilled when she told me that she had a job interview in Vancouver on November 2 with a big international bank. It was a management training position for one year in a city in South China. However, her parents did not want her to find work immediately. They wanted her to go to graduate school. If she did want to find a job, she should work in Canada, not in China, they advised her. Magnolia told me that she also wanted to go to graduate school, but she just wanted to experience something different this time. She did not expect that she would get this interview when she submitted her application. She was just very lucky, she told me. She had no idea what was going on!

Our conversation started with Magnolia recounting her Vancouver interview experience and what she learned about herself during the whole process. The fact that she landed the job interview was a boost for her self-confidence, she said. At the same

time, she also realized that she had a lot to learn in terms of preparing herself for future interviews and for future life in general:

> I didn't prepare myself well. I had this attitude of trying it out. I had no intention of getting this job. So the interview didn't go well. I won't know the result until December, but I don't feel good about it. Although I am not that disappointed, I don't want this job in the first place, I feel that I should take everything I do very seriously in the future.
>
> (Magnolia, research conversation transcripts, original in Chinese, November 8, 2002, p. 1)

Knowing that her parents would persuade her out of this interview experience, Magnolia did not tell them for three weeks until the night before the interview day. She was going away to Vancouver and felt that her parents should know this. She phoned them and asked them not to be too upset with her decision. Initially, her father still insisted that she should go to graduate school as her first choice. After listening to her reasoning, he eventually agreed with her that this would be a great learning experience for her and gave her the green light. Magnolia felt happy and grounded when her parents supported her decision and gave her their blessings for this trip. And I was surprised to notice how much more mature Magnolia had become:

Lisa: While I am listening to you, I am thinking… Do you feel that you are growing up, you are making your own decisions, especially those big decisions in your life? In fact, the reason that you phoned your parents was not to ask for their permission, but to tell them that you have made such a decision and that you hoped they would support it.

Magnolia: Right! Right! That's exactly how I felt. I think whatever I do, if I have the support and blessings from the people who are closest to me and who love me the most, I will feel very confident and happy in going ahead. I will feel less pressured.

Lisa: Everything prospers in a peaceful home, as the saying goes. (家和万事兴。)

Magnolia: Right! In a letter to my paternal grandfather, I told him that during my years of studying in Canada, I realized how important it was to have a peaceful home.

(Magnolia, research conversation transcripts, original in Chinese, November 8, 2002, p. 4)

Although Magnolia is the only child, her father comes from a big family and has three brothers and one sister. When she came to Canada to study, her grandfather also gave her some financial support, more than he did to the other grandchildren. All her uncles and aunts seemed to understand and support her endeavour, not only financially but also emotionally. Whenever she returns home in China, she is happy because she knows that her family members live their lives in harmonious relationships. When she is away from home, she is free of worries. And she always wants to return to such a peaceful home, where she belongs and where people care deeply for one another. Magnolia makes regular long distance phone calls to her parents and grandparents, asking about how they are doing. Since she doesn't have any brothers or sisters, her cousins become very close to her. She cares for them and hopes that they will have a good life too. One of them is dating and Magnolia asks her how it is going. Another wants to come to study for his master's degree in Canada and Magnolia advises him to take more math and statistics courses now so that he will be better prepared for his overseas studies. For Magnolia, everybody knows his or her roles and responsibilities in a peaceful home. And everyone flourishes in a peaceful home.

Magnolia also told me the reason she decided to go for the interview. During her second trip home this summer, she realized she would be on her own if she wanted to stay in Canada and to find a job here. Her parents could no longer make decisions for her. She had to take full responsibility for her own future. We talked about her trip home this summer and I asked her if she noticed any differences between this trip home and the previous one two years before.

Magnolia: I returned home in China this June and came back at the end of August. I stayed for two and a half months. I volunteered in a local bank for a month or so, but most of the time I stayed at home. I became very lazy. I didn't know why. It seemed that living abroad for two years on my own I was exhausted. I had no energy left. As soon as I was home, my whole body relaxed completely. I remember before returning home, I told my parents that I would cook meals for them when I was there. Here I always cook my own meals. But I cooked no meals, not even once for them. I became very lazy because I could depend on my parents again to take care of me at home. What's more, I felt this time I didn't respond to people as emotionally as I did last time. Last time when I visited China, I had a very strong feeling towards my home, but this time I identified with my home less strongly. This time I felt there were a lot of responsibilities on my shoulders.

Lisa: How come you felt this way?

Magnolia: I just had this sense. I don't know why.

Lisa: Responsibility? You didn't have the sense last time?

Magnolia: Last time when I returned to China, I had three more years to finish my university. It was still too early to think about my future. This time it was different. Besides, my uncle's son also wants to go abroad. My uncle told me that my cousin would come to me. If he didn't say that, I was a free person. I could go wherever I wanted to. If I couldn't find a job and

settle down in Canada after graduation, I could return to China and find a job there. I was a free person. But because of his words, I felt that I had to stay here for my cousin's sake. I just had this sense. This time I felt a sense of responsibility. For a long time I knew I should be responsible for my own future, and now this sense becomes even more acute. I realize my parents cannot help me. I am on my own. If I were in China, my parents could help me find a good job through their connections after my graduation. But now, I don't have that any more.

Lisa: Right. It's not possible.

Magnolia: That's why I made the decision on my own to go to Vancouver for the interview. I feel the time has come for me to make my own decisions. I cannot let my parents decide everything for me any more. I knew they had very good reasons to push me into graduate school, but I wanted to try other possibilities as well.

(Magnolia, research conversation transcripts, original in Chinese, November 8, 2002, p. 3)

I remember Magnolia's comments about her being and feeling lazy at home in those two trips to China. She wondered why she became very lazy and didn't keep her promise to cook meals for her parents, not even once. Her whole body just relaxed and she just wanted to be taken care of after two years of living on her own. For Magnolia, home is a place where she can return for physical comfort. At the same time, home is also a place where she doesn't need to pretend or explain herself. Her parents know and accept who she is. She can just be herself.

While Magnolia recognized her responsibility towards herself and her family, she felt torn between this responsibility and the freedom to become whoever she wanted to be and to do whatever her heart desired. After her second trip to China, not only did she feel

responsible to support her parents in their old age, she also felt an added responsibility towards her uncle, who wanted her to stay put in Canada. Because of her sense of this web of relationships that are home, Magnolia felt even more responsibility being placed upon her. She realized that she was not free to go anywhere as she wished.

Knowing that this will probably be their last year together, Magnolia told me, she often sits with Jasmine, *Mei* and Rose in their two-bedroom apartment, talking about their future plans and where to make their own homes. At one time, *Mei* made a suggestion that they should all go to the Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008 and have a reunion there. She even invited each one of them to make a prediction about their lives: By 2008, will they have been married? Will they have children? And whoever made the wrong prediction would pay for their reunion meals. In the end, they all said that they would be married and have children because they would be in their late twenties and felt they should start a family by then. But nobody knew for certain what would happen. Among those conversations, Magnolia sometimes shared her dreams with them:

> I told them that before the age of 30, I want to be a world traveller. I want to see the world. After I come to Canada, I see many people live different ways of life. My ESL teacher's daughter has been travelling for the past four years. She said that her daughter was going to university soon after one of those trips abroad, but that hasn't happened yet. She is still travelling around the world. Thus, I think if I can let go of some things, don't mind too much about them, and find out what I truly want to do for my life, there are many life paths ahead of me that I can choose from. Right now, the only concern I have is my parents. They want me to settle down so much. They want me to immigrate to Canada, as if that will give them a sense of security during their old age. They tell me that after my immigration I can do whatever I want to and they won't say a word. But I feel if I want to immigrate and settle down here for their sake, I might force myself into doing something that is

> against my will or personality. If they don't give me that condition, after graduation, I can do whatever I want. I will go to many places. I will go wherever I can find a job. I don't care if it is in China, Canada, Singapore or Thailand. I want to work and live in one of those Southeast Asian countries for a year or two and then move on to another one. Before I turn 30, I want to be on the move. I don't mind where I will land. After I am 30, I need to settle down because I am not sure this kind of migrant life is secure or not in my old age when I no longer have as much energy as when I am younger. I need a sense of security then.
>
> (Magnolia, research conversation transcripts, original in Chinese, November 8, 2002, p. 6)

When I sensed Magnolia's internal conflict between the freedom to become who she wanted to be and the responsibility she felt towards her parents and her uncle, I asked her if she had thought about making a sacrifice or modifying her dreams in order to fulfil her responsibility. She said she knows her parents will depend on her in their old age because she is their only child. Her father once told her that their future lives would be determined by her plan for her life. And she wanted to help her uncle and her cousin realize their dreams, too. That's why she felt a lot of pressure and she was always thinking, considering, and hesitating about what to do next in her life. For Magnolia, her decisions were interconnected with her relationships with her parents and her extended family.

I wondered if Magnolia's dilemma and uncertainty about her future was related to her sense of alienation in the wider community even though she had lived here for more than four years. She told me,

> I still feel that we don't have enough direct contact with native Canadians. I remember you once mentioned that we may not notice it ourselves, but our way of thinking may already be Canadianized. This change has already taken place in us over time. I think if I have more contact with native Canadians, I will

> have a better sense of their way of thinking and their way of living.
>
> (Magnolia, research conversation transcripts, original in Chinese, November 8, 2002, p. 2)

On the one hand, Magnolia realized that she was still outside the mainstream because she yearned for more direct contact with native Canadians so that she could have a better sense of the Canadian way of doing things; on the other hand, she could not find an entry point into the mainstream. When I asked her how she was going to seek out those opportunities to increase her direct contact with Canadians, she had no idea. So we talked about volunteer opportunities around university campus and other social activities that might involve her in direct contact with native Canadians.

Will Magnolia ever feel that she belongs here? What does she have to do in order to feel at home here?

Can I stay here?

Journal Entry: January 10, 2003, Edmonton

Magnolia and I had our second research conversation on November 15 for an hour in the Kiva Room. She also brought along her research journal for me to respond to. I finished the transcribing of this conversation on November 18. My right wrist was sore from writing 10 pages of Chinese characters! I am a little behind with my transcribing

schedule. But I am really excited that my research is moving ahead, maybe too much work and too fast a pace for my own good!

When I was reading Magnolia's first research journal entry, I was surprised when I came across the following part:

> I never feel safe on this land though Canada is the safest country in the world. Whenever I walk on the street or stand on the bus, I feel I am a foreigner; I always fear I could be kicked out of bus though Canadians are very nice. However, I don't have this feeling in the class or on campus.
>
> (Magnolia, research journal entry, November 14, 2002)

I wonder why Magnolia feels so fearful outside the university campus after living in Edmonton for four years. Is it because she spends most of her time on campus, attending classes, working in labs, studying in libraries and doing her assignments in computer labs that she feels she knows this place, which gives her a sense of security? She often mentions to me that all her friends are from her ESL classes. Although people are more respectful of differences on campus, it is still very difficult to make friends with native Canadian students. Nevertheless, that small group of ESL students gives Magnolia a sense of community on campus where she feels she belongs. When she is out there, she is worried that she will be judged by her skin colour and on being not good enough as an English speaker. As she says earlier, she feels she is an outsider, who can be kicked out of here at any time.

Magnolia and I agreed that we wouldn't meet again until after Christmas because she wanted to finish her autobiographical writing and I needed some time to read our

second research conversation transcript more carefully and to start making some sense out of it.

On December 23, 2002, Magnolia sent me an email, responding to a piece of writing entitled *The Experience of Studying in a Foreign Language* (Lee, 2002). My friend *Keun-ho Lee*, an international graduate student from South Korea, wrote this for one of his courses and gave me a hardcopy. With his approval I then shared it with Magnolia, Jasmine and *Mei*, asking each one of them to respond to it when they had the time. I found Magnolia's response intriguing:

> I really like *The Experience of Studying in a Foreign Language* because many similar things happened to me and I can feel the feelings of the author. Do you remember I told you I never feel safe in this land? I think the label of "international student" makes me think of myself as "strange and alienated".
>
> (Magnolia, e-mail messages, December 23, 2002)

However, Magnolia did not elaborate on what she meant by linking her fear in Canada to the label of "international student", which placed her feeling at the margins. So I asked her to clarify this for me in our research conversation today and she said:

> At first I had a sense of pride when I was called an international student. But now I no longer want to be called an international student because I have lived here for four years. I don't like to be called an international student, but my legal status is still an international student. I don't like the label any more. Often when we go job hunting employers will say sorry as soon as they know we are international students. I think this may not be the only reason. But I feel I have been here for more than four years and I should not be counted as an international student any more. I think if one stays in a place for one year, at most two years, and then moves to elsewhere, if one keeps moving on like that, then he or she is an international student. We have lived here for four years. When a friend asked how long we had been here, we said that this was our fifth year here in Edmonton.

> And he said, "Oh! Old Canadians!" But we are still called international students and I don't like this label any more.
>
> (Magnolia, research conversation transcripts, original in Chinese, January 10, 2003, p. 1-2)

Magnolia's discomfort and resistance of being called an international student is related to her current desire to settle down and to belong here. There is a temporal shift in who she sees herself becoming. She feels that she has been here for more than four years. She knows this place and she has friends here. She doesn't want to keep moving around and being called an international student. She feels she is ready to settle down and claim this place as hers. However, that label separates her from the native Canadians and reminds her that she is a foreigner and that she can only stay here temporarily. On the one hand, she wants to leave this place and move on; on the other hand, she is not willing to leave. Often when she walks to and from classes on campus, she wants to see more of this familiar place because she fears that one day she might not see it again. She looks at everything on campus very carefully and tries to remember them so that she can carry them in her head when she leaves. She wants to stay here, but she has no idea how that is going to happen. It is very difficult for her to find a job as an international student. She is applying for graduate schools all over Canada, but she doesn't know if she will be accepted. She feels lost and hopeless because she cannot see her road ahead.

I wonder if Magnolia's fear stems from the internal emotional turmoil she is going through. It seems that she has bought into the responsibility of taking care of her cousin if he decides to come to Canada for studies. She feels that she has to stay, but is fearful that she cannot. As much as Magnolia understands what her parents want for her and what her uncle wants for her, she knows in her heart that she wants to leave and be

the free young spirit that she is and go elsewhere. She finds it very difficult to live with these conflicting messages inside her. While home, her parents and relatives, want her to stay and not to leave Canada, by Canadian rules, she is international and she cannot stay. It is difficult for her to get a job or to be accepted into a graduate school. She cannot see her road ahead. She cannot live out the story that home is telling her to live out. And yet she really wants to go and be a free spirit and do whatever she wants to do. How is Magnolia going to live with all these tensions within herself? When will she stop feeling fearful in Canada? Will she ever feel that she belongs here?

* * *

Robert Hay (1992) wrote,

> Those who do develop a strong bond to place exhibit territoriality and local knowledge, which deepens through both aging and length of residence. Those without such bonds normally move on. Others who have lived only part of their lives in the place often have a more rational, detached relationship with that place, at least for the first few years, as they may yet move on (p. 101).

Through four years of residence, Magnolia comes to know the University campus and its surrounding areas quite well. This place also allows her to develop some meaningful relationships, especially her friendships with Jasmine and *Mei* and their ESL peers. It is only when she is confronted with the gloomy possibility of leaving that she realizes she has come to love this place. She has developed a strong bond to this place without consciously knowing it. However, labeled as an international student, inevitably she has this "move on" mentality. Thus, for the first four years in Canada, she felt as if she were hovering above. She did not want to touch the ground, to take root or to develop any attachment to this place. She was not sure if she belonged here. What's more, she was

going somewhere else to live the rest of her life, what's the point of investing any time or energy to know this place? She did not try to seek out opportunities to know this place or to meet the people. Without many meaningful relationships, this place remained a foreign land and she was an outsider, fearful of being kicked out of here at any time.

Homes, Sweet Homes

Journal Entry: February 8, 2003, Edmonton

Finally I have the time to sit down and write about what seems to me the threads that are coming out of Magnolia's stories about her homes in China. We had this lively research conversation on November 15 last year. Our conversation started with my direct question, "What is home for you right now?" And Magnolia's response was:

> Home, to me, is when I am with my father and my mother. This is how I feel about home. I wrote in my journal that I believe my home is in China because all my family members and relatives are in China. While I am here, I always wonder where I should go after I graduate from university. I don't think I will stay here for long, so I never really tried to make a home here. So I always feel homeless here, thinking that my home is in China. I think that's the reason that after so many years, I still don't really immerse myself in this society, this place. I limit my definition of home to those that I have blood relationships, to my parents. They are all in China, so my home is in China.
>
> (Magnolia, research conversation transcripts, original in Chinese, November 15, 2002, p. 1)

Magnolia sees home as blood relationships right now. Since all her blood relationships are in China, her home is in China. However, on the other hand, she also sees home as place in the following stories she told me about her experiences of home in China. And I wonder if this tension between home as blood relationships and home as place is related

to the changed landscapes on which she lived/lives her life. When she lived in China, all her blood relationships were there, so they stayed in the background while place moved to the foreground in her experiences of home. When she lives in Canada, all her blood relationships move to the foreground and place moves to the background when she thinks about home. Therefore, home as blood relationships and home as place are intertwined in Magnolia's stories. Growing up in China, Magnolia had a very fond memory of all those different places that she called home. She remembered a room on a balcony as her first home:

My first home: A room on a balcony

I was born in Green City, my mother's hometown. It is a beautiful seaside city. My mother and I spent my first month in my grandmother's home. (做月子, *Zuo Yue Zi* means "make the first month", a Chinese traditional postnatal practice to help a new mother learn how to care for a new baby.) Her house was a Japanese-styled one-room house, very small. When my mother was young, she used to sleep with her three sisters in a bed dangling from the ceiling at one corner of the room. The bed was quite small, so these four girls were crowded like sardines. I also slept on that bed when I was young.

There was a very big balcony behind my grandmother's house. My grandfather, my father and my uncles built a small room on the balcony when I was born in July. So my mother and I spent my first month there. Whenever I returned to visit my grandmother the following years, I always stayed in that room in the summer. It was too cold to live in the winter.

My grandfather used coal to keep the house warm. So my mother used to tell me that wherever I put my hands in that house, they would turn black. When I was young, I thought that place was dirty. But now I do not feel that way at all. I feel that place was the most comfortable place in the world. I have an intimate feeling about that place even though in reality it was old and dark.

When I came to Canada in 1998, the Green City Municipal Planning Department tore down all these added-on constructions. The room and the balcony were all gone. When I heard the news, I was very sad, very sad. In reality, I only returned to Green City once or twice a year, but I was still very sad when that place was gone.

(Lisa's reconstruction in English, based on research conversation transcript of November 15, 2002 in Chinese)

Located in present-day Edmonton, Magnolia travels back in time to her first home in China. She doesn't really remember how that place came into being. It is a family story she has been told. It stretches back to her mother and her grandmother because that was a very traditional practice. She tries to recollect how she felt as a young child long ago about the black walls and her dirty hands. She thought that place was dirty in that moment. And now, looking back, she doesn't feel that any more. Instead she feels that was the most comfortable place in the world. It is not the dirty hands or black walls, but the feelings of comfort and intimacy that she remembers as an adult. When that place was gone, Magnolia was very sad. She could not visit it one last time, being so far away in Canada. Now she can only visit and revisit that place in her memory and in her imagination.

Magnolia has no memory of her second home, a one-room house with a yard in the Rich Oilfield, where her parents worked until she was two and a half years old. In 1983, her family moved to Foggy City, a smaller seaside city, where Magnolia grew up. This is the city she really loves.

My third home: A big court yard and a lake

My home was located in a big courtyard at the foot of a mountain, 20 minutes walk from the sea. The courtyard belonged to the Rich Oilfield and was a small community on its

own. It was situated at the suburb of Foggy City. A stream was on the right of the yard; a big farm was on its left. I often saw the cows walking to cross the small road in front of the courtyard. And I could pick tomatoes or strawberries in the summer.

Within the courtyard, there were five rehabilitation buildings and one treatment building. Both my parents and many of their colleagues worked there. There were a big square, a fountain, a cinema and a very big canteen. There were also a public bathing house, a coal supply store and a basketball court. It was a self-contained small world.

We lived on the fourth floor of an apartment building. Our apartment had 54 square meters with two bedrooms. I had my own bedroom. For a family of three, it was very big. So our living condition was much better.

I went to the nursery in this courtyard and many of my playmates were children of my parents' colleagues. We played in the big courtyard and often went to one another's houses. During suppertime, people could hear our parents' call our names from the apartments. My mother called me through the window from the fourth floor and I always arrived home on time for dinner.

I loved the courtyard. It was my heaven. I played with my friends around the courtyard. We searched every corner of the courtyard. We knew all the trees, flowers, grasses, waters, buildings and stones. All the children were safe in the yard. There was no stranger, no traffic, no dangerous building. People knew one another very well.

I didn't like it when they filled up the lake. I didn't understand why they would do that. It was not a real lake, but rather, a reservoir. Whatever it was, it was a very special place within the courtyard. It was such a good place with so much water. It was a very big reservoir. We used to catch small shrimps and small fish there. I lost my small bucket in it. I rushed into the water and played with my friends all day long in the summer time. I had so many happy memories with this reservoir. Now it was gone. I just didn't understand why they needed more land.

(Lisa's reconstruction in English, based on research conversation transcript of November 15, 2002 in Chinese)

Home as place and home as relationships are intertwined differently in this story. Magnolia remembers this place in vivid details. It is all bound up in a little heaven in her memory and in her imagination that is shaping that memory. For her, the big ugly world was out there and she was in here with her friends in this beautiful place with water and grass and flowers. She was safe and happy in this well-defined place. There were no strangers, no traffic, no dangerous buildings. It was also a close-knit community with very close relationships among the people who lived there. In this small world, Magnolia knew her place and she knew that she belonged.

Magnolia only moved one more time in China. Within the same courtyard, she moved from the fourth floor in one building to the second floor in another. She missed her old home on the fourth floor, where she lived between 1983 and 1995, more than 10 years.

My fourth home: Same size, same style, but different feelings...

These two places were the same size, but one was in the east side of the building, the other was in the west side. I missed my home on the fourth floor very much. My paternal grandmother used to love to stay with us, but not any more. Our home on the second floor was too dark for her.

I lived in this home for three years until 1998 when I came to Canada to study. The first time I returned home in 2000, this home was being renovated. So I stayed at my grandfather's. It's a big apartment, about 80 square meters, but I didn't like it there. I couldn't wait to return to my own home. I was very anxious. After about one week, I returned home. I missed this familiar place.

One thing I do not like about this home is outside every wooden apartment door there is an extra iron door. People are afraid of

break-ins. When my mother phoned to ask me if our home should have an extra iron door, I told her not to do it. It would feel like staying in a prison.

I missed those old days when the people in the courtyard would go shopping together in Foggy City on a big bus once a week. At the end of the day, we met again at a certain time in a certain place to take the same bus home. In winter, a bus would send the children who went to the schools in Foggy City in the morning and take them home in the afternoon because it was very cold and the roads were covered with snow. During the rest of the year, all the children walked to their schools. They cancelled these two services in 1999, one year after I came to Canada. After the municipal government moved near the courtyard, the business centre also followed. That small road in front of the courtyard became a very busy street. There was a bus terminal nearby. It was very convenient for people to take the public transportation to go to Foggy City.

(Lisa's reconstruction in English, based on research conversation transcript of November 15, 2002 in Chinese)

Magnolia is in the same courtyard, but it has changed dramatically from the old familiar place she has known intimately as she grew up. Now there is an iron door outside each apartment. The little safe place she remembers is gone forever. Now it is a place of danger where people have to put iron doors to protect themselves. Magnolia doesn't want that iron door. Her resistance is in part coming from her memory of a safe place, where there was no need for iron doors. With the loss of a sense of security within the courtyard and the convenience of modern transportation system nearby, the relationships among the courtyard residents are changing. The old communal way of life is disappearing rapidly. Magnolia misses those old days. She misses her weekly bus tour to the city with her family, neighbours and friends and her winter school bus service, both of which gave her a sense of community and her place within it. The fact that all

those changes took place while she was away in Canada has made it an even sharper contrast in her memory of that home place.

Magnolia also talked about her father's hometown, Big City, where she returned once or twice a year to visit her grandparents. She felt that place was also her home.

My other home in Big City: the Old is Better Than the New

During Chinese New Year every year, my parents and I visited my grandparents. We stayed in their one-bedroom apartment. In the summer or winter holidays, I sometimes stayed there too. I had a feeling for that place because I had so many happy memories. I remember when I lived there one winter some old buildings nearby were being torn down. Those were old wooden buildings built by Russians or Japanese a long time ago. In winter we needed wood to make a fire for our coal stoves, so many children went there to pick up the wood. I remember the guy guarding the wood was very serious-looking. As children, we could only find a few small pieces of wood, but that adventure brought us a lot of fun. Later, whenever I returned to Big City, I always told my cousin about that story: how a group of children stole wood from that man.

I remember I raised some chickens in the balcony. In summer, my father and I used wet flour dough to catch cicadas to feed the chickens. In winter it was very cold outside, so all the children stayed inside and played fireworks in the hallway. Sometimes the paper boxes in the hallway would catch fire and everyone would go and put out the fire. All the children in the building knew one another and would visit and say "Happy New Year" during the Chinese New Year.

My father also told me many stories about his life when he grew up. It all occurred in this home and the surrounding neighbourhood in downtown Big City. There used to be a market nearby and I went shopping with my grandmother. My father had many stories related to this market. But it was torn down many years before. Since this home was very close to the busiest street in Big City, we went to the bookstores and food stores and many other stores along the street every night. It was very convenient and fun.

> When I returned home in 2000, I also visited my grandparents in Big City. They had moved to a new place. I was not very comfortable with this new home at first. I still missed that old place. Once I went shopping and decided to see that old neighbourhood one more time even though it was not on my way. The old building was torn down. It was gone forever.
>
> (Lisa's reconstruction in English, based on research conversation transcript of November 15, 2002 in Chinese)

Looking back, Magnolia tries to recollect the stories about her own childhood in her father's hometown and how she felt as a young girl long ago. Her sense of adventure and excitement is well illustrated in the wood-stealing story she keeps telling her cousin to this day. For Magnolia, that home was also a safe place, where she felt comfortable and happy because all the children knew one another and played together during the Chinese New Year. She probably could tell where all those different stores were in the neighbourhood since she went there every night. Through a family story her father told her, that home and its neighbouring area were rendered meaningful to Magnolia and gave her a sense of history. She also remembers her irresistible desire to visit that old familiar place closer to the present time on her first return trip to China in 2000. She made a special detour to visit her grandparents' old apartment and its old building, which were all gone by then. Now all her happy memories associated with that home only exist in her imagination.

As I was listening to Magnolia talking about her homes in China and reading the conversation transcript, what struck me the most was the fact that she has called so many places in different cities her home. For Magnolia, she has all those homes that have been her home that now live in her imagination. She sees the first place as home, but not the only place she calls home when she thinks about where her home is now. Magnolia helps

me to understand that people can have multiple homes and that it is the meaningful and significant relationships with people that make a place home.

Another Home in Canada?

Journal Entry: March 13, 2003, Edmonton

I have been working with Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* on their resumes and application packages for graduate schools for the past several weeks and I sense their growing worries and anxieties about their uncertain future. Not knowing what else I could do to encourage them at this point in time, yesterday I decided to e-mail them a powerpoint presentation entitled *The Four Candles*. I really liked the story it tells about hope when one of my Canadian friends sent it to me a while ago.

> **The Four Candles**
> The four candles burn slowly.
> The ambiance was so soft you could hear them talking.
> The first one said, "I AM PEACE! However, nobody can keep me lit. I believe I will go out."
> Its flame rapidly diminishes and goes out completely.
> The second one said, "I AM FAITH! Most of all, I am no longer indispensable, so it doesn't make any sense that I stay lit any longer."
> When it finishes talking, a breeze softly blows on it, putting it out.
> Sadly the third candle spoke in its turn: "I AM LOVE! I haven't got the strength to stay lit. People put me aside and don't understand my importance. They even forget to love those who are nearest to them."
> And waiting no longer, it goes out.
> Suddenly, a child enters the room and sees three candles not burning.
> "Why are you not burning? You are supposed to stay lit till the end."
> Saying this, the child begins to cry.
> Then the fourth candle said, "Don't be afraid! While I am still burning we can re-light the other candles. I AM HOPE!"
> With shining eyes, the child took the candle of hope and lit the other candles.
> The flame of HOPE should never go out from your life
> …and that each of us can maintain HOPE, FAITH, PEACE and LOVE!!!!

When I opened my email account this evening I found the following message from Magnolia:

> Hi Lisa,
> Thanks a lot. These tips you sent me comfort my heart. I am really upset these days because I got news that the competition of getting in the master's program is extremely intense: 300 applicants compete for only 4 positions! Many friends told me it is impossible to get in. This result is really out of my expectation and I don't keep much confidence of getting into the program now. I talked with my Dad last night. He suggested me to work for one year and then apply for graduate school next year. He said the road of life is not always straight or flat; this is only the first difficulty in my life. When I knew the last candle is hope, my eyes were full of tears. I hope I can be the person, who never loses my hope. Thank you.
> Magnolia
>
> (Magnolia, email messages, March 13, 2003)

My eyes are also full of tears when I read Magnolia's message. If the door to graduate school is closed, now she has to find employment in Canada, which is next to impossible. Things seem to be out of her control at the moment. I feel very sad for her. I know she comes to like this place and does not want to leave here if she has a choice. During our research group conversation on November 29, 2002, after I shared with Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* Allen Say's (1993) picture book, *Grandfather's Journey*, Magnolia told us about that turning point in her life when she realized for the first time in three years that she wanted to stay in Canada, at least for a while:

> When I listen to the story and see the pictures, I remember this April we went to Drumheller. For the first three years in Canada, I missed my home very much. I felt my life in Canada was really boring and meaningless. We were driving on our way to Drumheller, it was about four or five o'clock in the afternoon. The sun was setting. I was struck by the vast space of the Canadian prairie and its color and its mountains and I thought, "Wow, there are beautiful places like this in Canada!" Its beauty is different from the beauty in Jasper or Banff. It's another kind,

> very grand. At that moment, it occurred to me that I should stay in Canada for a longer while, at least I should visit those places before I return home. I feel the same as the grandfather in the story felt. When you go to many different places, different things will attract you and move you.
>
> (Magnolia, Research group conversation transcript, original in Chinese, November 29, 2002, p. 5)

That awakening moment has stayed in Magnolia's heart and mind for more than half a year now. It is the first time that she starts to place herself on the landscape and to recognize the landscape as the possibility of home, a possibility that she hadn't seen there before. The beauty of the natural physical landscape of the Canadian prairie draws her in. She wants to see more of Canada to appreciate different things in different places. Canada is a beautiful country and she wants to stay, Magnolia decided. However, while Magnolia feels embraced by the natural world, she has difficulty meeting more Canadian people in order to feel welcomed by the human world. It seems that she cannot enlarge her social circle beyond her ESL friends. So when Michael[10], a Canadian student who was taking a Mandarin course in the Department of East Asian Studies, approached me before Christmas for a Mandarin-speaking tutor, I recommended Magnolia to him and suggested that they should do a language exchange.

On December 22, 2002, Magnolia sent me an email, telling me that she and Michael emailed each other every day, that they talked about both funny and serious questions and that she learned a lot from him. Later she told me that they met in person several times before and after Christmas break, during which Michael went up to the north to work in an oilfield to earn some money and they maintained email contact.

[10] A pseudonym.

When he returned to Edmonton, he showed Magnolia some pictures he took of that oilfield. Since Magnolia's parents also worked in an oilfield in China, they had a lot to talk about. When he and his family went on vacation in Cuba over the summer, Michael brought Magnolia an interesting gift - a small Cuban box with Magnolia's name carved on it! Michael even organized a Chinese-English language exchange program. However, there were far more Mandarin-speakers than English-speakers. With only two English-speakers and 10 Mandarin-speakers, Magnolia also turned into an English-speaker!

When Michael was away, they chatted on MSN about a variety of topics. Through all those interactions, Magnolia came to know how Michael lives his life and what is important to him. She no longer felt as isolated as before. Michael was the first Canadian university student that Magnolia had real and meaningful conversations with in all these four years! In addition to language exchange, Magnolia also changed her previous perceptions about local Canadian students. She used to think that they were lazy because they did not study as hard as many international students. But Michael did not fit into that category at all. He was very self-confident and strived to succeed in whatever he was doing. He dared to dream. He wanted to learn Mandarin very well so that one day he could work in the Department of Foreign Affairs and become the Canadian ambassador to China. He told Magnolia how challenging it was to study Mandarin with a class full of Canadian-born Chinese students. But he did not give up because he had a dream to follow. Through Michael, Magnolia realized that her assumptions about her Canadian peers were biased and not true.

Magnolia also took part in the *Celebrating Christmas Day with a Canadian Family* organized by the International Centre on campus. Magnolia as well as three other international students from China were paired up with a Canadian family, who live on a farm one hour drive from the city of Edmonton. There are five people in the family: a couple and their two sons and one daughter. The mother immigrated from Switzerland to Canada when she was 18. The father inherited the farm from his family. He probably renamed his farm after his wife's name to give her a sense of ownership and belonging. Their daughter was 10 years old, 12 years younger than Magnolia. The elder son was 15. They were home-schooling their children on the farm, an unknown concept for Magnolia. It was interesting for Magnolia to see so many farm animals. One of the baby lambs lost its mother at birth and they showed Magnolia how to feed the baby lamb with bottled milk. The farm is a self-contained small world, Magnolia observed. During summer time, they work very hard and plant a variety of vegetables. At harvest, they put them into air-tight bags and save them for their winter food. They don't need to do much grocery shopping in winter. They invest most of their money on the land and they have little cash at hand. So they live a frugal life. The mother is worried that their two sons might not inherit the farm. They may choose to leave home and live a different way of life after college.

On Christmas Day, this family also invited another couple from a nearby farm. So they had a table of 12 people for Christmas dinner. During the day, they all went skating on a frozen lake except the hostess, who was preparing the dinner. The daughter was very good at playing hockey. Later, they returned to the house, eating, drinking and chatting away. What struck Magnolia the most was their guest book. Every year this

family invites guests to their farm regularly, not just on Christmas Day. Each guest would write a sentence or two in the guest book. Over the years they have accumulated a long list of guests and many photo albums to record those memories of people from around the world. Magnolia felt that life on a farm was quite isolated and that they had fewer friends. So they were also happy to receive visitors, especially the mother, who thought it was important for her children to interact with people from different places. Being home-schooled, the children had few opportunities to interact with people from outside the family. On weekends, they also drive their children to Edmonton to play soccer or learn German, but their interaction with others is still limited. Magnolia felt the mother is a very intelligent woman because she has created opportunities for her children to learn from and to interact with people from all four corners of the globe by inviting them to her home! In fact, Magnolia had so much fun on the farm that she stayed there until after midnight! On January 11, just before the new term started, she was invited back along with the other three Chinese international students for a sleepover on the farm. When reflecting on this Christmas break, she wrote:

> During this Christmas holiday, I met many local Canadians: a Canadian family, Michael, and some of the Canadian classmates I know, but do not have regular contact. I realize that the quality of life here is very good too. I like it here as well. Now I don't know if I can stay here to make a home myself.
>
> (Magnolia, original written in Chinese, response to research conversation transcripts of November 15, 2002)

Meeting native Canadians and spending time with them opens a window for Magnolia to look inside the Canadian way of life, to see how local Canadians spend their leisure time and to understand why they live their lives the way they do. She is happy that she has had some first-hand experiences and realizes that she likes it here and wants to stay and

make a home if she can. As she prolongs her stay here and gets to know more and more Canadians and develop a web of meaningful relationships, Magnolia feels that she might make a home here in Canada.

In the same response, Magnolia also wrote:

> I regret that I didn't immerse myself in the Canadian society for the past four years. You are right in saying that wherever I go, I should suppose that I will stay there for a long time. In this way I will try very hard to adapt to the new environment instead of hovering above in the air.
>
> (Magnolia, original written in Chinese, response to research conversation transcripts of November 15, 2002)

Hovering above in the air, Magnolia has a bird's eye view and looks down at the Canadian landscape, but she is not part of it. She is not grounded. She can see the big picture of the landscape, but everything inside seems small, strange and distant. She has no idea where to land or how to ground herself. So she stays hovering in the air, watching and waiting for the right moment to come down. Her encounters with Michael and the Canadian family during this Christmas break are those right moments when Magnolia feels welcomed onto this landscape and starts to see the possibility of herself as becoming part of it.

Magnolia's regret of not immersing herself in the local community and becoming part of it sooner reminds me of my own experience as a graduate student and as a new immigrant in Canada. For the first three years of my stay in Canada, I also felt like hovering above in the air and unwilling to touch down. As a graduate student, I watched, from a distance, my professors and fellow Canadian graduate students carry out their work and studies both in and outside of classrooms. And I waited in silence, patiently, for that magical moment when I would feel comfortable joining in their discussions and

conversations. Not until I received an invitation to sit on the selection committee as a graduate student representative for our Department's Second Language Education position and experienced the academic hiring process at the other end of the table, did I come to understand how the Canadian academic world functions and start to see a possibility of my finding an academic position on this landscape. As a new immigrant, I did not have a sense of settling down in Canada because *Guoji* worked in Jasper and *Yan-Yan* was still in Shanghai with my parents-in-law. I didn't have any significant relationships here. I lived in two different students' residences on campus instead of buying a house and making a home here. I didn't think it possible for me to get a job I love in Canada. I wanted to live the rest of my life somewhere else. I was not interested in making friends with local Canadians. Most of my friends were international graduate students within my department. However, it was very exhausting to stay hovering above in the air for such a long period. I ran out of my energy. I felt a need to come down and take a rest…

* * *

In *The Other Way to Listen* (Baylor & Parnall, 1978), Byrd Baylor (1978) suggests that we need to become part of the landscape before we can really understand and appreciate it. The landscape is not out there; we are on the landscape. In a similar vein, Leslie Marmon Silko (1996) also talks about the viewer of a landscape is not "outside or separate from the territory she or he surveys. Viewers are as much a part of the landscape as the boulders they stand on" (Silko, 1996, p. 27). But when we behave like tourists, we often don't see that because the landscape is there and we are looking at

it, we are not in it. As strangers to a new place, we want to figure out when, where and whether we can step onto the landscape. However, until we are really part of the landscape, we don't feel comfortable stepping in because it is always someone else's landscape.

Towards the end of his article, Keun-ho Lee (2002) realized that the differences he had as a newcomer could contribute to make the Canadian landscape rich and diverse, and that it was possible for him to become part of this landscape, no longer a strange world of others. However, "[i]t takes a lot of practice. You can't be in a hurry" (Baylor & Parnall, 1978) in order to really become part of a landscape.

My Temporary Homes in Canada

Journal Entry: May 8, 2003, Edmonton

After a hectic month of April, I finally find some time to sit down and read through the research journals Magnolia has kept for the past six months. The following part draws my attention:

> I find a very interesting phenomenon. This month, I don't buy a bus pass. I walk to and from university. Whenever I go to the university, I don't want to walk. I want to take a bus. But every day after school, no matter how bad the weather is, I always have the energy to walk home. My steps are very brisk and my heart is like a shooting arrow, already at home. I think in my heart, home is a very definite target, a very clear concept. It is a place where I belong. I can wear whatever clothes I love to wear, eat whatever, whenever and wherever I want to, scream and talk loudly. I can cry whenever I want to, and laugh

> whenever I want to. Home is a place where I can relax my body and release my soul.
>
> (Magnolia, journal entry, original in Chinese, March 23, 2003)

This home Magnolia refers to is a two-bedroom apartment 20 minutes walk from the university campus. She moved into this place with her three Chinese friends Jasmine, *Mei* and Rose in June 2000 and has lived there for almost three years now. Jasmine has her own bedroom while Magnolia and *Mei* share one bedroom and Rose takes up one part of the living room as her space. To Magnolia, this is the first place that she would call her "home" during her four and a half years of stay in Canada. It is a place that provides her with both the physical comfort and emotional support. She is clear that it is a place where she belongs. She feels that she can just be herself without worrying about being judged by her friends just like she is at home with her own parents. It is a place where she is free to wear, to eat, to scream, to talk, to cry, and to laugh. It is a place for her soul. Knowing that they will probably go separate ways after graduation, Magnolia wants to spend more time with them. So every day after school she is eager to go home.

While Magnolia was very willing and eager to talk about her experiences of home in China and her current home in Canada, she avoided talking about her first year experiences of home in Canada completely during our research conversations. I knew bits and pieces from our conversations that she had had some very negative and painful experiences during that year. I did not want to push her into a place she was not willing to go. So I waited… Magnolia finally decided to write about her first year in Canada in Chinese and I translated it below:

> Five years ago when I first stepped onto this land, my heart was filled with anxiety and helplessness, perhaps with fear too. This sense may have lessened a great deal over the years, but the

uncertainty caused by migration makes me feel homeless more or less all the time. My horoscope is Cancer. I long to have a warm home.

In September 1998, we, ten students from China, lived in our guardian's house. Jasmine and I stayed in one bedroom. At that time, I treated each one of them as my family members. I think they felt the same way. We were very happy. There was no academic pressure because we did not know that we had to pass TOEFL test yet. Everything was so fresh and new and exciting. We did not have the time to worry about what would happen one year later. I believed in our guardian. I believed that she would take care of us till the end of our overseas studies. After dinner, I would go out for a walk with Jasmine. Sometimes I was alone. I did not worry about anything. I was so relaxed that I felt light, light as if I would float away by the slightest breeze.

The only thing that made me unhappy was not because of homesickness, but because of one annoying boy, who opened our bedroom door in the middle of the night or broke into the bathroom. Even now when I think of him, I feel annoyed. Jasmine used her big suitcase to block the door; I used mine to add and strengthen the blockage. All of a sudden I felt very safe. After all, we were two together. When one of us went to the bathroom, the other guarded the door. Unfortunately, this was only the beginning of a nightmare.

Two two-bedroom apartments close by each other were rented. Five students shared one apartment. On the last night in our guardian's house, Jasmine, *Mei* and I, as well as three or four good boys got together in our bedroom. We sang many songs together. Usually I don't sing, but that night I sang so many songs. We sang together, and laughed together. It was the happiest time for us during that year. It was gone forever.

On the day of moving-out, September 30, 1998, conflicts exploded among students and between students and the guardian. *Mei* and I were staying behind in the house to keep an eye on our belongings. We did not see the quarrelling scene with our own eyes. But I knew from that moment that our lives would never be peaceful again.

(Magnolia, written piece in Chinese, March 28, 2003)

Unlike Jasmine and *Mei*, who were eager to come to Canada to start their overseas studies, Magnolia did not choose to come herself. She was not sure whether it was a good idea or not. Her parents sent her here in the hope that she would have a better future. Leaving home so far away for the first time, Magnolia felt anxious, helpless and fearful. She was happy to meet nine fellow students from China and treated them as her own family members. She spent her first 15 days in Canada, living with them in a three-bedroom single house with a basement. It was in this house that she first met Jasmine and *Mei* and started their long-term friendship. However, this was not a place that Magnolia would call "home" because she and Jasmine were always on alert during their sleep and they had to guard for each other to go to the bathroom. There was no sense of security for them with the presence of seven strange young men, particularly the mischievous one, in a strange house. Things did not improve much when five of them moved into a two-bedroom apartment.

> In our new apartment, Jasmine and I shared one bedroom. *Mei* had her own room. Two boys lived in the living-room. Nobody would break into our rooms in the middle of the night any more. This new place was quite close to the high school we went to. Our guardian's husband delivered our dinner every evening. Waiting for him to bring our dinner and waiting for the doorbell ringing seemed to become my most expected moment in a day. What's for dinner tonight was the question that preoccupied me. I had a glass of milk, an egg and a small snack for breakfast. Before I came to Canada, I never drank milk, or ate boiled eggs, or touched any snacks. To me such a breakfast was torture. But I had to eat it because I did not want to go to school feeling hungry. (Now I live on my own and I still have the same breakfast!) I had sandwiches or rice with green beans for lunch. At first I felt it was okay to eat this kind of food. But later I was only able to swallow the food mechanically, just to fill my stomach. Therefore, dinner was very important to me. But I had to eat fast; otherwise I would leave the dinner table still hungry because there was not enough food. We were all

eighteen or nineteen years old, an age that we could eat and drink a lot! Even now, I cannot change the habit of eating my food too quickly. In the past, I was very picky about my food. I did not touch many kinds of vegetables or meat. But now I eat everything.

I am thankful for this time period when I had no choice but to eat whatever was there on the table. Hardships make people grow.

When the Spring Festival in 1999, the first Chinese New Year that we spent without our families, was around the corner, I had a sense of loss. The other four roommates in my apartment all applied for visitor's visas to invite their parents to come to Canada to celebrate this Chinese New Year with us. I was both sad and happy. I was sad because other students' parents could come, but mine could not; I was happy because meeting other students' parents made me feel as if I was meeting my own. In the end, three mothers and one father came. Both Jasmine and *Mei*'s mothers visited us. At that time, many were worried about me. They were afraid that I could not endure this emotional turmoil. To everyone's surprise, I was doing okay. I felt really intimate and close towards these aunts and uncle. As a matter of fact, only two years later did I know about the truth: my maternal grandmother passed away on December 26 on the Chinese lunar calendar, four days before the Chinese New Year. At that time, both my parents were in my grandparents' home in Green City. They had no time to visit me. At that time, only I was kept in the dark. Everybody else knew about this, but they did not tell me. I was too young then. I did not even notice anything strange.

Mei often came to our bedroom to sleep at night because the boys in the other apartment often came to ours. Three of us chatted until late at night. We talked about everything, just like the university dormitories in China. *Mei* and I became closer and closer. After school, Jasmine often stayed behind in the school to practice playing the piano; *Mei* and I went to the library, did our homework and went home together. Jasmine had a boyfriend then and spent a lot of time with him. We all supported her. Even though her mother opposed this relationship firmly, Jasmine and that boy still came together. For the first time in my life I asked myself: would I have the same courage if I were Jasmine?

The conflicts between boys were always present. I often felt anxious when I was living as a group member in that apartment. The two boys in our apartment had a fight one night. One of them broke into my bedroom in the middle of the night and dialed 911 to call the police. I hid myself under the quilt and cried out of fear. The storm was over eventually. But living with two grumpy boys in that apartment, I had this sense of fear and anxiety all the time. As soon as I arrived in that apartment, I was on my tiptoes for fear that I might trigger someone's bad temper. That was the period of time that I could hardly breathe normally. Everything looked gray and I had to suppress every emotion I had. That was my first winter in Canada, a winter filled with bitterness and heartaches. In my memory, not one single day in that winter was bright and sunny. It seemed to me that we had wind and snow everyday.

My mother wrote to me in her letter, asking why I looked so thin and pale on the photos. She said that I looked sick. I did not notice it myself until she mentioned this in her letter. I looked at myself carefully in the mirror. I looked really awful. During that year, my soul was burdened. I had to accept all the pressures from different aspects of my life. Home was far far away in China. If I returned home, and that meant one year of failure; if I stayed here, my heart was wandering away. Fortunately I had *Mei*. When we were together, we could share so much, both the joy and the sadness in our lives.

Spring has come to us finally...

(Magnolia, written piece in Chinese, March 28, 2003)

Tears are welling up in my eyes as I am reading Magnolia's story about her first year in Canada. No wonder she did NOT want to talk about it with me... That apartment was certainly not a homelike place for her. In fact, it was just the opposite of what she had experienced as home in China. There was no sense of comfort, security or warmth of a home for her, only anxiety, worry, and fear. She could not be herself. The only comfort and emotional support she had was the companionship and friendship *Mei* provided. What a great relief it must have been for her when she as well as Jasmine and *Mei* was

admitted into their undergraduate programs at the U of A and moved out of that apartment on the last day of July 1999!

What stands out for me in Magnolia's two writings about her experiences of home in Canada is how she links her heart to her sense of home. In her long writing when she described her first year in Canada (1998-1999), Magnolia talked about her heart wandering away in those two places where she did not feel at home at all. That is such a different view from how she wrote in her journal entry of March 23, 2003 about her heart like a shooting arrow, which has a very clear target – her current home. She is eager to return to this home because it is a place where she feels she belongs.

Over the years, Magnolia experienced a drastic shift in her sense of belonging. When she first came to Canada, she was feeling happy and belonging. She expected that her guardian would take care of her till the end of her overseas studies. She treated her fellow Chinese students as her family members. Very soon, however, she found out that there was no sense of belonging for her in the guardian's home or the two-bedroom apartment. She could not even relax her body when they had to guard the door of the bathroom and move the suitcases to block their bedroom door. There was no relaxing when the grumpy boys were around. She had to be on tiptoes for fear that she might trigger someone's bad temper. In comparison, by 2003, she was living in a place where she feels she belongs, where she can relax her body and release her soul, where she can wear whatever she wants to, eat whatever, whenever and wherever she wants to, scream, cry and laugh. This has been Magnolia's home for the past three years. Before settling into this home, Magnolia, Jasmine and *Mei* lived in another place for almost a year.

With the help from their ESL teacher and guardian, the three young women rented a one-bedroom apartment close to the university and were on their own for the first time in their lives. On Saturday, September 25, 1999, Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* invited me over to their place for dinner to celebrate the Mid-Autumn Festival -- a traditional Chinese holiday for family reunion. Now I know they had more than one good reason to mark the occasion in their new place!

At 4:30 p.m., Magnolia and *Mei* met me at my office and then we walked to the Chinese Supermarket on the southside, not far away from where they lived. We bought green onion, ginger, celery, ground pork and some Chinese dumpling wrappings and walked to their place. They told me that Jasmine would join us later because she had another dinner party to attend. She had bought several moon-cakes and put them on the table.

While Magnolia and *Mei* were washing the green onion, ginger, and celery in the kitchen, I looked around their new place. It was a basement unit with two big glass windows in the living room facing south. Three desks occupied each one of its three corners. Jasmine had just bought a new computer, so it was easier for me to tell which desk was hers. In the bedroom, there were three single mattresses lined up on the floor with a pillow and a quilt folded neatly on each one of them. In the kitchen, there was a small square table with three chairs of different sizes and shapes around it.

Since there were only two cutting boards in the kitchen, Magnolia, *Mei* and I took turns to chop the green onion, ginger, and celery into small pieces. We then put them into a big bowl, mixed them with ground pork and added salt and cooking oil. The fillings of the dumplings were ready. We sat down around the table and wrapped the dumplings

together. I knew how to wrap wonton, a southern Chinese snack; but I had no idea how to wrap *Jiaozi*, a northern equivalent. Both Magnolia and *Mei* showed me, very patiently, how to do it properly. I followed their instructions step by step. However, my *Jiaozi* still looked very different from theirs. And we had a good laugh. By then we had already started sharing our stories of when, why and how each of us came to Edmonton.

Because none of us were good at cooking, and making *Jiaozi* had several steps, it took us almost two hours to put our dinner onto the table. Around 7:30 p.m. when we were about to eat, Rose phoned to ask if she could join us. She lived with her cousin's family at that time. We waited until she came and started our dinner at 8 p.m.

We decided that we would wait for Jasmine to share the moon-cakes together. It was not until 9 o'clock that Jasmine finally returned. We cut the moon-cakes into four pieces so that we could taste each of the three different flavours. They were delicious. Meanwhile, our conversations continued until I realized that it was too late for me to walk back to my place. I had to stay overnight.

Five of us crammed into the bedroom, three on mattresses and two on the floor. And our conversation marathon continued. They were very curious about my life and work. In a sense I was interviewed by four of them about the history of my education, my family, in particular, my love story. I understood their curiosity and wonderment. Back in Shanghai, I had taught students of the same age for 10 years!

I finally went to sleep at 5 a.m. the following morning when Rose exhausted her questions. We got up around 10 o'clock in the morning, had our leftover *Jiaozi* for brunch, and chatted again until 4:30 p.m. Before I left, Jasmine gave me her diary and

asked me to respond to it. I declined at first, but she insisted. I put her diary into my backpack, feeling overwhelmed by the absolute trust from a young heart.

Left on their own, Magnolia, Jasmine and *Mei* set up a very different space in their one-bedroom basement apartment. They have three mattresses on the floor in the bedroom. They share the living room space for their individual desks. They try to recreate a place of belonging where they feel safe with each other and where everyone can belong. Although it is a basement suite, this place is in sharp contrast to the previous two places where they did not feel safe or have a sense of belonging.

On January 15, 2000, Rose moved into Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei*'s apartment and put her single mattress on the floor in the living room. She had not been happy living in her cousin's house because of numerous incidents of miscommunication and misunderstanding since she first came to Edmonton in September 1998. She had nowhere to go, so she turned to her three friends for help. They took her in even though it was already very crowded in their place. Magnolia, Jasmine, *Mei* and Rose spent most of their time on university campus, attending courses in classrooms, reading textbooks in libraries, and doing assignments in computer labs. They only returned to their place for sleep and dinner. In the morning when they left for university, they would pack their lunches. These four young women moved into a two-bedroom unit on the third floor in another apartment building on June 1, 2000 and have lived there for almost three years now. This is the home Magnolia talks about in her research journal entry on March 23, 2003. It is the place where she belongs and where she can relax. When reflecting on these three moves, Magnolia said,

> I feel it is very normal. This is a necessary process. During the first year, we finished our language study. When we entered the

> university, we needed to find a place close to the university. The student residences in Hub Mall and Newton Place were too expensive. We felt that it was better for the three of us to stay together. So we found a one-bedroom apartment. Later because of Rose's move-in, that place became too small and we had to move again.
>
> (Magnolia, research conversation transcripts, original in Chinese, November 15, 2002, p. 10)

For Magnolia, not all the places that she has lived in since she first came to Canada in 1998 she would call home. She only considers her current two-bedroom apartment as her temporary home in Canada. She has lived there for three years. She has three friends to share her life with. Living under the same roof with Jasmine and *Mei* for several years, Magnolia shares her happiness and sorrow, successes and failures, dreams and fears with them. They come to know one another very well. They are the most significant relationships she has in Canada. She cares about them deeply. When she doesn't see Jasmine for a couple of days because of different class schedules, Magnolia finds ways to meet and talk with her to make sure that she is doing well. She also spends much more time at home now, doing homework on the laptop computer she just bought recently. Before that, she had to go to computer labs on campus, and thus spent most of her waking hours around the university. Whenever they have some free time this year, Magnolia would sit with her three friends and just talk. In her heart, she knows that this will probably be their last year together. She cherishes every minute that she can be together with them because they are her home in Canada, a place where she can relax her body and release her soul and where she knows she belongs.

My Two Worlds

Journal Entry: June 2, 2003, Edmonton

This afternoon I went to Magnolia and *Mei's* convocation ceremony at the Jubilee Auditorium. I was happy to meet their guardian, two handsome young men and a couple from Calgary. We were all there to celebrate their great achievement. Because of SARS, Magnolia and *Mei's* parents did not apply for visas to come to Edmonton to attend this important event in their young lives. As I sat in my seat, watching and trying to capture Magnolia and later *Mei* walking across the podium in their graduating gowns and hats on my video-camera, I wondered what their parents might have seen in their daughters if they had been there. Will they see two familiar young faces, and yet they talk, walk and behave in strangely different ways? They will certainly feel proud that Magnolia and *Mei* obtained their first university degree in a foreign language, but will they see the deeper changes that have occurred inside these two young women? When they left China for Canada five years ago, they were two naïve Chinese "little princesses" of their respective families. Now they are two confident and mature young adults, two global citizens of the world. They have grown and developed so much within these five years!

As a matter of fact, Magnolia is keenly aware of the fact that she has become a different being because of her life experiences in Canada, that she now lives in two different worlds, that sometimes these two worlds will merge without her consciously knowing it and that sometimes it is better to keep them separate. During our group conversation on November 29, 2002, Magnolia shared with Jasmine, *Mei* and me how she really felt about herself:

> When I finished reading my own story for the first time, I told you that I felt guilty at some parts of the writing, feeling that I

> had changed so much. But now as I reread it again, I know my thinking may sound awful, but I no longer feel guilty any more. I feel that was how I really felt at that time and I don't need to hide that feeling any more. I know in other people's eyes, it is not so good. It seems that I have forgotten my past. I know some people will still say that, but I don't care any more. That was how I felt. Even if I felt guilty, shameful, that was how I felt. I don't care what other people think about it any more.
>
> (Group research conversation transcript, original in Chinese, November 29, 2002, p. 8)

Being honest with her own feelings requires courage, the courage to tell the wider world who she really is and to feel comfortable about it. It is certainly not her Chinese upbringing! Magnolia accepts the fact that she has changed a lot since she came to Canada and that she is now a different being, for better or for worse! She is no longer afraid of being and becoming who she is: a Canadianized Chinese, a mixed being of some sort. This is also manifested in her comfort of using both her Chinese name 玉兰, *Yu-Lan*[11] and her English name Magnolia:

> I am used to *Yu-Lan* as my name and feel very normal about it; while I also feel comfortable to be called Magnolia. But I seldom combine these two names. However, when filling out a form if I am asked whether I have a middle name, I usually put Magnolia on it.
>
> (Magnolia, email messages, January 6, 2003)

Magnolia seldom combines her Chinese name with her English name because she knows very well that sometimes it is better to keep her two worlds separate and as they are. In one of the email messages, she reflected on her experience with the Canadian family over the Christmas holiday and wrote:

> Another interesting thing is the change that happened to me, but

[11] Yu-Lan, a pseudonym, is the Chinese equivalent for Magnolia.

> I did not realize it myself. In my father's family, men usually eat first and women cook in the kitchen. If there are not enough spots in the dining room women have to wait even after they finish cooking. I never feel anything strange about this rule. But this time when I went back, I could tell how unfair I felt about it. But I won't change this rule in my family because that's the way it is.
>
> (Magnolia, email messages, January 6, 2003)

Magnolia becomes very aware of how women are treated differently in this Canadian family from her father's family. But she is very cautious about using her Canadian standards to judge her family members in China. Later, she told me that she had a very strong emotional reaction the moment she realized how unfair it was to treat her mother and her aunts in this way. But she remained silent because she was still in China. After a while, she no longer felt as indignant as she did at that first moment. That was just the way it was/had been. Who was she to tell her family to behave otherwise at home in China?

Living in between these two worlds, Magnolia realizes the changes that are taking place inside her. When responding to our conversation transcript of November 15, 2002, she wrote the following in Chinese and I translated it into English paragraph by paragraph:

> 无论是在 Foggy City, Green City 还是 Big City， 我的家庭地址都不止一个。但对我而言，让我留恋，让我眷顾，让我怀念的家都是“老”家，都是有我和我父母的故事的地方，而不是更大，更畅亮的新家。
>
> Wherever it is in Foggy City, Green City or Big City, I have more than one address. But to me, the homes that I think about, I care about and I miss are those "old" homes which are filled with my and my parents' stories, not the bigger and more spacious new homes.

所以家不仅是一个物质上或实体上的居所，更是心灵和精神上的归宿。在读着这篇对话时，我脑海里浮现的都是“老”家。所以我相信家是一种感情。当我对一个地方产生了感情，我就会把这里当作我的家。

Therefore, home is not just a material or physical place. Home is more of a spiritual place. When I was reading this conversation transcript, my mind was filled with the images of my "old" homes. Therefore, I believe home is a feeling, an emotion. When I have a feeling for a place, I will consider it to be my home.

中文世界是我的第一感情世界，我用中文表达，叙述，流露，宣泄我所有的感觉，用中文描绘我的生活，所以毫无疑问，中国是我的家。

Chinese world is my first emotional world. I use Chinese to express and to describe all my emotions and my life. Without any doubt, China is my home.

但随着英文世界在我生活里不断地扩大，我发现英文是一种很简单，很优美，很幽默的文字，那么我是不是正在接受第二个家呢？我想是的。我喜欢这里，对这里也有感情，所以我在变，我也喜欢这种变。有时可能感觉不到这种变化，因为他们是潜移默化的，但变化是实实在在的，对于家的概念也正是在扩大。

However, as the English world expands in my life, I find English is a very simple, beautiful and humorous language. Am I accepting my second home? I think I am. I like it here. I have a feeling for this place too. So I am changing. I like this change. Sometimes I may not sense this change because it takes place subconsciously. Nevertheless, the change is there. My definition of home also expands and changes.

(Magnolia, written response to research conversation transcripts of November 15, 2002)

Magnolia considers those old homes that are filled with stories about her and her parents as her homes in China, not the bigger and more spacious new homes. To her, home is more of an emotional and spiritual place than a physical one. And her feeling of an emotional and spiritual place is intricately tied to the languages that are spoken. When she develops a feeling for a place, she considers it to be her home. And part of that

feeling comes from the language that is being spoken. As the Chinese world is her first emotional world, China is definitely her home. In one of the journal entries, she wrote:

> These days, I often dream that I have returned home and that I am with all my families and friends. I can't help phoning home all the time. I really miss my home. After so many years, I still miss my home very much even though sometimes I don't. Home is where all my loved ones are. We keep one another warm, and support and care for one another. It feels more like a home especially when there is an older generation in the home. That is the reason that I love to return to my homes in Big City and Green City: so many people I know and love. I feel the joy of the crowd and the happiness of letting them take care of me.
>
> (Magnolia, research journal entry, original in Chinese, February 16, 2003)

After five years of living abroad, Magnolia still misses her homes in China, where all her loved ones are. These are homes full of warmth, support and caring people. She loves going back to visit her parents' hometowns because her grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins all live there. She enjoys the crowd and is happy to be taken care of. She appreciates that part of the feeling that she has there comes from this inter-generational sense of time stretching back and her relatedness in this temporal web of family relationships. They are both her emotional and social ties to these places.

However, as Magnolia prolongs her stay in Canada, the English part of her life expands. Now she finds that English is a simple, beautiful and humourous language. She once told me that it is easier and faster for her to read in English than in Chinese nowadays. The first time she received my typed Chinese transcription, she showed *Mei* and they giggled over the crowded page full of Chinese characters. They both felt it strange to look at such a page. Their eyes were more accustomed to the English text. As Magnolia's English gets better, her thoughts in English are faster, but not as fast as when

she speaks in Chinese. So in class discussions, she is more a listener than a speaker. It takes her longer to think in English and she has no confidence to talk in English with her native Canadian peers. She often feels exhausted at the end of each term because she has to study both the English language and the subject matter at the same time. Unlike some of her friends who think it not fair for them to compete with Canadian students, Magnolia acknowledges this big disadvantage and accepts the responsibility that it is their choice to come here and study in Canada. She does not complain at all about her situation. And encouragement from others always makes her feel better. In her English 101 course, the professor really appreciated her writing and her thoughts. He even suggested that she should major in English! To this day, Magnolia is still encouraged by his words even though it seems impossible for her to become an English major.

As Magnolia feels more and more comfortable with the English language, she thinks she is accepting her second home in this second language. She likes Edmonton. She has a feeling for this place too. She is changing and her definition of home also changes and expands. Home is no longer limited to her families and friends in China. Whenever she has a feeling for a place, she will consider it to be her home.

While Magnolia recognizes the possibility of making a home in Canada, she also knows in her heart that this home will be quite different from all her previous homes in China:

> In my life in Canada, loneliness is the predominant emotion. It is like a vine, reaching out to every corner of the soul. Although nobody talks about it, I can tell. Sometimes I don't know that's called loneliness. Sometimes I am too busy to remember it. Sometimes I cook "phone porridge" with my friends for hours in order to get rid of this loneliness. Everybody is living a hard life. Those who have decided to work, study and live here on a long-term basis are stronger than I am. They overcome their

> emotional impulses and persuade themselves with reasons to stay and live here. Many of my friends tell me that they want to return home very much, but they still live here. Everyone has a reason. All the reasons are not for oneself. Day by day I become one of them and I often think of the farmers who live all their lives on the yellow earth back in China. Actually they are no less happy than we are. They have a life of simplicity that is brought to them by the simple and modest land.
>
> (Magnolia, research journal entry, original in Chinese, February 16, 2003)

In sharp contrast to the crowd she enjoys in her previous homes in China, Magnolia experiences the emotional and social loneliness that reaches out to every corner of her soul in Canada. In order to get rid of it, she either keeps herself very busy or phones her friends for hours on end. She admires those people who have decided to work, study and live in Canada for a long time because they can overcome their emotional impulses to return home in China and find various reasons to convince themselves to stay here. As she slowly becomes one of those people, Magnolia often thinks about those farmers who stay put in one place all their lives in China. For Magnolia, who is looking at their lives from the outside, she assumes that they are blessed with a simple way of life. She assumes that they do not have choices. She assumes that they do not have struggles, either.

Magnolia knows that deep inside she has changed. She becomes conscious that she lives in two different worlds and that she should think and behave differently according to the context she finds herself in. In the last research journal entry, Magnolia wrote:

> I brought my Canadian habits back to home. My parents accepted some of them, but did not quite understand others.

A glass of milk for breakfast. My mother thought that I lived in Canada for four years and everyday I had egg and milk for breakfast and that I must have been tired of eating them. So she prepared a variety of Chinese breakfast for me. But I told her that I missed my daily milk. So my breakfast became vegetarian buns and milk or preserved vegetables, steamed buns and milk. She could not make sense of what I was eating! Usually we eat salty food with porridge and sweet snacks with milk.

Change clothes daily. In Canada, I have acquired the habit of changing my clothes daily. My parents could not stand it. Once it was taken off, it needed washing. What was this habit of wearing one set of clothes only to take a walk one day and putting on another set the next day? My mother scolded me. She even complained to our neighbours, which both embarrassed me and made me feel funny.

Say thank-you to everybody. Whoever it was, a waiter in a restaurant, a farmer in the market, or a friend, I always said thank-you. I felt awkward too. Later I did not say it any more. And nobody criticized me for being impolite!

I was tired of seafood, my favorite food in the past. Once I vowed that during this lifetime I would never have enough of seafood. But this time when I returned home, I was not as much interested in seafood as I was in meat and vegetables, two kinds of food that I ate the most while I was in Canada.

Environment can really change a person. When I returned home I realized that I have changed, bit by bit. I had nothing to chat about with my friends. When I saw beggars on the streets, I had a feeling that was beyond words. I wished that one day everyone would have a home and that nobody would sleep in the streets. To some people, what they want for a home is not much, just a place where they can shelter their bodies, but they can't get it. To others, home is not only a place to shelter them from wind and rain, but also a place to rest the soul.

I often daydream. If I have a house of my own, how will I decorate it? Whatever I imagine, the sense of security comes on the top of my list. The second will be brightness. The third is many books. Therefore, home to me is a place of security, a place of comfort and a place for my soul.

(Magnolia, research journal entry, original in Chinese, April 27, 2003)

Magnolia is very aware of the tensions that exist between her newly-acquired Canadian ways of doing things and the old Chinese ways that she is expected to follow when she returns home in China. She uses her creativity to solve her problems. She combines salty Chinese buns with her daily Canadian milk for breakfast. She ignores her mother's complaining about her strange habit of changing her clothes daily. She reminds herself not to say thank-you to everybody automatically because she is in a different place. She eats more meat and vegetables than seafood, her past favourite. Magnolia realizes that she has changed, bit by bit. She has nothing to talk about with her friends in China because of her different life experiences in Canada. She is more compassionate towards homeless people and wishes that they could at least have a place to shelter their bodies from wind or rain. Magnolia starts to imagine a house of her own and how she might decorate it. Then she slides to her definition of home. She is still moving back and forth between a house, the physical aspect of a home, and the emotional part of home. She is still trying to figure out what is home after her house is set up brightly and decorated with many books. For her, a house does not automatically become a home if it does not have the feeling, the language, the comfort and the security of a home. And Magnolia wants her future home to be both a place of brightness and full of books and a place of security, a place for her physical comfort and a place for her soul.

Will Magnolia make her future home in Canada, in China, or somewhere else? I have no idea. But I know she will stay in Edmonton for a longer while. Two weeks ago, Magnolia and *Mei* were both provisionally admitted into their master's programs at the U of A on the condition that they would take some pre-requisite courses to qualify

themselves for the programs during the first year. Depending on their grades and performances, the department would then make a final decision to accept them or not.

Before the family and friends and the new graduates crowded into the auditorium lobby, I took some pictures for/with Magnolia and *Mei* alongside two young men, their guardian and a couple from Calgary. I was happy to be one of the eye witnesses of their great accomplishment, not just today, but all these past five years!

This salmon story is like what Lisa says about foreign students' situations. It is not easy going back home because of the unfamiliarity with the changes that have taken place in China when we are away. However, there are also a lot of difficulties staying in Canada because I am a foreigner. 歧视总是存在的，否则为什麽经济不景气时总是先裁黑头发黄皮肤的亚洲人。而且在加拿大总感觉自己是寄人篱下，没有一种熟悉感和安全感。在加拿大已五年了，要回去发展又谈何容易？人在变，社会在发展，国家在进步，要回去恐怕还要适应一段时间，就空气污染而言，我也要有充分的思想准备，但毕竟还是自己的国家，亲人朋友聚集的地方，在精神上会感到充实。[12]

(*Mei*, Response to Prologue, February 16, 2003)

Chapter Five *Mei*

It's Time to Make My Own Home?

Journal Entry: November 13, 2002, Edmonton

I met *Mei* for our first research conversation in the Kiva Room this afternoon for two hours. I have been wondering about what she has to say on the topic of home since she wrote me an email two weeks ago:

> I am happy to join with you on your research journey. When you mention the word "home", I think I only have a narrow thought on it. Maybe it's the time for me to think about it and talk with you.

(*Mei*, E-mail messages, October 28, 2002)

[12] English translation: Discrimination will always exist. Otherwise, why are black-haired and brown-skinned Asian employees fired first every time when there is an economic recession? In Canada, I always have a sense that I am a second-class person. I do not have a sense of this place and a sense of security. I have been in Canada for five years, it is not easy for me to return to China and start my career there, either. People in China are changing. The society is developing and the country is progressing. If I want to return, it will take me quite a while to readjust to the Chinese way of life. For example, I should be prepared for the severe air pollution in China. But after all, China is my own country. All my loved ones and friends are there. I will feel happy and content there.

So I asked *Mei* what she meant by having a narrow thought on home. She responded:

> Whenever you mentioned the word "home" in the past, I used to relate it to my home in Foggy City, where my parents live. Now my definition of home is broadening. I ask myself, what is home? Home is when you need help or when you encounter difficulties and need someone to talk to... I feel parents can give you more support. I feel when I grow up... I am in my 20s now... during those four years in Canada, I may have changed a great deal psychologically, a big range... so that my parents may find me a stranger to them because I do not communicate with them as much or as often as I did in the past because it is expensive to make overseas phone calls. As I grow older, I leave my parents. And they will know and understand me less and less. They will understand me less rather than more. So as I am getting older, I should look for a boyfriend and get married. The older I become, the more I will share with him my feelings, thoughts, hurt and unhappiness. I won't tell my parents because they are growing old. They have taken care of me for almost 20 years. Now I should share only my happiness, not my worries, with them. Therefore, as I grow older, I will find a boyfriend and make a home of my own. This is another home for me.
>
> (*Mei*, Research conversation transcript, original in Chinese, November 13, 2002, p. 3)

For *Mei*, home is a relationship. She defines home as when one needs help or encounters difficulty and needs someone to talk to. *Mei* used to think of home as blood relationship. Home was where her parents were. For her, home was a place where she could always return for support. However, leaving her first home and being on her own for the past four years in Canada, *Mei* realizes that she has changed psychologically to such an extent that her parents may find her a stranger in their own home. Living her life in a linguistically and culturally different world from her parents', *Mei* knows that her parents will understand her less and less as time goes by. She worries about the relationship and who she is in the relationship. Now *Mei* considers home as a relationship with this wonderful young man she is yet to meet. She wants to find a boyfriend, whom she can share her feelings, thoughts, hurt and unhappiness with, and start her own home, her

second home. As the only child, *Mei* now wants to share only her happiness, not her worries with her parents because they are getting older and they have taken care of her for almost 20 years. It is time for them to enjoy their life in peace and free of worries as she is now ready to take care of herself and move on with her own life.

Mei left her home in China for Canada in September 1998. When she returned to visit in 2000, her parents had moved from their old home into a new place, a place she could not readily call her home. It did not feel like home to her, *Mei* told me. Sometimes she still misses her old home where she had lived for about 10 years before coming to Canada. During her second trip to China this summer, she realized that her parents' home is no longer her home:

> Now I feel that home is no longer my home. That home no longer belongs to me. In the future I will make my own home either here or in China if I return. After all, I am a grown-up now. I can not always live with my parents. What's more, during this most recent trip home, I had a sense that I am now only a visitor in my parents' home. Because I didn't live at home for several years, my mother's wardrobe was full of her clothes. When I went home this summer, there was no space left for my trunk. So I put it in the basement and scattered my clothes all over there. (She laughed while talking.) My mother came down and said, "Oh, no! You will stay at home for two and a half months. I will make some room for you." So now I feel as if I were a visitor in my parents' home. That home no longer belongs to me.
>
> (*Mei*, Research conversation transcript, original in Chinese, November 13, 2002, p. 7)

Mei's parents moved into this new home when she was away in Canada. In their minds, she was going to finish her degrees, find a job, settle down and start her own life in Canada. So they set up their life in this new home without planning for her return. Although *Mei* still has her own bedroom in this new house, she does not feel as comfortable there as she did in her old home. Everything is new to her. She needs time

to get used to it, she told me. She still misses her old home, a familiar place where she knew that she belonged. For *Mei*, home is also a place. With the loss of a familiar physical space in this new home, *Mei*'s sense of belonging also changes. She no longer feels that home belongs to her. She is now merely a visitor rather than a person who really lives in her parents' home. She only stays there for a few weeks whenever she goes back to China to visit her parents. As a matter of fact, her mother had to make special efforts to find some space in order to accommodate her into their life again:

> Sometimes I feel they are not used to my presence when I return. I break some of their daily routines. My mother takes daily walks. But because I was home visiting them, she wanted to spend more time with me. So she didn't go out for her walks. And she joked, "Ah! You'd better leave soon. After you return, I no longer follow my daily routines and I gain weight." So sometimes I think that home is not my home any more.
>
> (*Mei*, Research conversation transcript, original in Chinese, November 13, 2002, p. 7)

Feeling like an intruder into her parents' current life, *Mei* was not comfortable returning to her parents' new home at first. A little confused, she is trying to sort out what home means to her now. Although deep inside she knows that her parents will always be her home, she realizes that it is time for her to start a new relationship with the man she is looking for, which will be her new home. *Mei* told me about the moment when both Magnolia and she became acutely aware of the need to look for their boyfriends in order to make their own homes:

> I went to the Edmonton International Airport to pick up Magnolia after her job interview in Vancouver. That night we both felt the same thing - it is time for us to find boyfriends. Because sometimes we have some thoughts, which are not safe to share with others, we can share them with our boyfriends. That night when Magnolia mentioned this, I told her I felt the same way. But the problem we face right now is that our life doesn't have a sense of permanence. It is not possible. And we haven't met the right one yet. So it is not possible at all.

(*Mei*, Research conversation transcript, original in Chinese, November 13, 2002, p. 9)

Both *Mei* and Magnolia felt that it would have been better if Magnolia had had a boyfriend who had gone to the airport to pick her up. They realized that it was time for them to consider finding boyfriends. However, being international students, they live in a state of uncertainty. Not knowing for sure if they will go to a graduate school in the United States or in other cities in Canada or find a job here in Edmonton or return to China after their graduation next year, they feel it a waste of their time and emotion to find boyfriends here. Besides, they don't want to hurt anyone or leave Edmonton with a broken heart themselves, they both told me. So they have concentrated all their time and energy on their university studies and have not spent any extra time in socializing or meeting more young men. Their social world is limited to their ESL classmates, most of whom are international students and are here in Edmonton temporarily for their university education.

I wonder how *Mei* is going to find her boyfriend here in Edmonton if she decides to stay? Will she return to China to find one? Where will she make her own future home, in China or in Canada?

Home is where my heart (and soul) is

Journal Entry: December 16, 2002, Edmonton

Mei and I had our second research conversation, which lasted about one hour and 15 minutes on November 20, 2002. I spent the next three days transcribing the tape in handwritten Chinese for about 10 hours. As much as I want her to read the transcript and

respond to it so that I can move ahead with this exciting research I am doing, I know it is better for me to wait. Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* have been busy with their final exams, and assignments. They won't have enough time to sleep, let alone for reading my transcripts! So when Magnolia finished her last exam this morning, I asked her to come by my office to pick up the transcripts, one for her and the other for *Mei*. I also told her that they could return the transcripts to me after the Christmas break. Since Jasmine is leaving for China in two days, I decide to give her the transcript when she returns to Edmonton in two weeks.

Unlike Magnolia, who feels that she has several homes in three different cities in China, *Mei* thinks that her home is in Foggy City, where she grew up and lived until she came to Canada to study in September 1998. *Mei* was born in her mother's hometown Lai County, which belongs to Green City right now. Her aunt, her father's younger sister, came and took care of her for about one year after her mother had ended her maternity leave and returned to work in the county's health clinic. Her father was working in Foggy City, where he was waiting for his work unit to assign an apartment to him so that his wife and child could live with him. When *Mei* was one and a half years old, her mother took her to Foggy City to join her father. And this is the first home she remembers:

My first home: The balcony and foreign visitors

> I remember my first home was on *Nan Xia* Road. I stayed in this home until I went to grade two. It was on the fifth floor. But somehow, my overall impression of this home was that it was dark. Maybe because of the poor lighting it felt dark. Upon entering the door, there was a hallway without windows. So it felt dark. There was a big bed and a black-and-white small TV on a chest of drawers in the room. The bathroom did not have a toilet that we could sit on. We had to squat down in order to use it.

My mother told me that when I was small, I was beaten on many occasions because of my stubborn character. I remember very clearly there was a balcony outside the living room. My father once wanted to teach me a lesson. I forget what I did that made him angry. My father said that I was too stubborn and he wanted to discipline me. So he locked me in the balcony. It was winter and quite cold. I cannot remember it clearly, but my mother told me later that I cried so loudly and so often that everyone in the apartment building knew that I could really cry. I was very mischievous at that time. While crying, I dirtied my two hands by touching the dusty floor of the balcony and then rubbed the dirt onto my face. I did that on purpose. I wanted to show them how pitiful I was, thinking that I was their child and they would do something to save me. But my father turned a deaf ear to my crying. My mother scolded him for treating me so badly and let me in. My father gave up. He said that he was no match for me.

On another occasion, I was crying all evening for some reason and my father could not go to sleep. So he took me out of the bed and locked me outside the main door. I did not wear any clothes then. I had a high fever for several days. I was usually a healthy baby. That was the only time I had a fever. My mother asked my father to stop disciplining me because whenever he tried I became sick.

When my father gave up his attempt to discipline me, my mother wanted to try. If I made a mistake, my mother would beat me. I would just cry without saying anything. My mother said, "If you promise you won't do it again next time, I will stop." But I said nothing. To upset her even more, I would move to the side of the bed and let her beat me again after the first round. She was furious. And I was really stubborn. But somehow, she managed to discipline me. After that, whenever I made a mistake and my mother wanted to beat me, I would say, "Mom, I will not do it again". Then she did not beat me.

This home was located in quite a big residential neighbourhood. There were many apartment buildings and many households. So there were a lot of children around my age. We always went to the kindergarten and played together after school. There was a certain committee, which organized foreigners to visit the neighbourhood every week. They came over the weekend and gave balloons, candies and a variety of foreign gifts to children. They went to the committee first and then visited each unit (every unit had several 5-storied apartment buildings) one group after another, bringing a lot of gifts to children because there were so many of us. They even took Polaroid photos with us. I think those were probably foreign tourists. They came in big buses. I was too young to care about who they were then. The only thing that mattered to me was to get those gifts. We would stand in a circle and they would give something to each

one of us. I remember clearly that we took pictures with foreigners. We had an extremely happy time then.

(Lisa's reconstruction in English, based on research conversation transcript of November 20, 2002 in Chinese)

Situating herself in present-day Canada, *Mei* looks back in time to her first home in China. She is not sure why her first home felt dark as a young child even though it was on the fifth floor. She doesn't really remember what happened to her when she was small. It is a family story her mother told her. But she does remember one particular place – the balcony outside the living room, where she was locked one cold winter day by her father to learn a lesson and where she often stayed and cried because of her mischievous behaviours as a young girl and her stubborn refusal to promise that she would not do it again. As a strong-willed child, eventually *Mei* did learn how to avoid being beaten by her mother and being locked out by her father.

Mei's happy memory of this home seems to be associated with the big neighbourhood she lived in. She had many friends around her age. They went to the same kindergarten and played together after school. She and her friends particularly enjoyed the foreign tourists' weekly visit in the neighbourhood because they brought a lot of balloons, candies and other foreign gifts to the children. She remembers that she and her friends also took pictures with those foreigners. *Mei's* excitement and happiness about that time period were very obvious in her voice and facial expressions when she told me about the experience in our research conversation. And I wonder if that early experience with English-speaking foreigners and her comfort of receiving their presents had stayed and come with her when she came to Canada 10 years later. Clearly, to a little girl in China then, foreigners had a lot of money because they came with balloons,

candies and presents. I wonder if this experience started to build up an image in *Mei*'s mind that foreigners were wealthy people and that foreign countries were lovely places filled with milk and honey.

Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* were born around 1980 when China was still a relatively poor country. The Chinese government had just adopted the open door policy and foreigners were welcomed again into China. Since Foggy City is along the east coast of China, it became one of those cities that saw a flood of foreign tourists, eager to experience the China they knew so little about at that time.

When *Mei* was about four years old, her mother went to Ji City to attend a school for professional development. Since her father was also busy with his work, they decided to send her to the countryside, where her grandparents lived. However, *Mei* didn't stay there long. Her mother cried when she saw the really dark and skinny country girl *Mei* had become after about one month living in the countryside. So she took *Mei* with her to *Ji* City, where they stayed for half a year before returning home in Foggy City.

When *Mei* was in grade three, they moved into her second home in Foggy City. This was the home *Mei* had until she came to Canada to study in September 1998.

My second home: A place of changes

When I was in grade three we moved to our second home. This place was near where my father worked. There were many government offices, police, municipal government offices and others, all in the same area. My kindergarten, elementary school, junior high and senior high school were all in the same neighbourhood. It usually took me 20 minutes to walk to school. In senior high school, I started riding my bike.

Our home was on the first floor in a five-story apartment building. The ground floor was the storage space for all the households in the building. Each household had its own small room with a light, but no windows. People could put their bikes in those storage rooms. Some put juice cans, bottles and other things in it.

There was a staircase leading to our first floor. We did not have a yard. There were three households on one floor. Ours was in the middle. Usually older people lived on the first floor. I do not know why we chose to live on that floor. Maybe my father thought that my grandparents would come and live with us.

This home was about 80 square meters and very bright and spacious. It had two bedrooms and a living room. I lived in a smaller bedroom. There were two dining tables. We used a smaller one. When my grandparents joined us, we used the bigger one.

I have a lot of friends, who lived upstairs or in the nearby apartment buildings. I preferred to play with boys instead of girls, whom were difficult to get along with. I ran with them everywhere and really enjoyed myself...When I grew older, I had more girl friends.

When I was in grade seven, my grandparents came to live with us. They lived in the countryside to wait on my great grandmother until she died. They stayed in my bedroom and I moved to the living room and slept there. There was a TV set. My parents bought another TV set for my grandparents. It was quite crowded, but still comfortable.

When I was in grade eight, my father went to Beijing and worked there for three years. So I moved and slept with my mother. When my father returned to Foggy City, my cousin, my aunt's daughter, also came to join us. She was from the countryside and she did not study well. She wanted my father to help her find a job in the city. Our home was really crowded after she came. She used to live with my grandparents in the countryside because her mother, my aunt, married and lived in a neighbouring village. She was closer to my grandparents than I was because I only lived with my grandparents for about a month when I was four years old. In the end, I moved back to my smaller bedroom and my cousin and my grandparents lived in the living room because it was bigger. It was still too crowded. So my mother found another place with three bedrooms and a small living room near our home. My cousin and my grandparents moved there later. We visited them every weekend.

When I was young, I often asked my mother why we did not visit my grandparents on weekends. In kindergarten and elementary school, all my classmates would ask one another where to go over the weekend. They all replied that they would go to their grandparents'. I was curious. Why did all of them visit their grandparents and we did not? My mother told me that my grandparents lived in another city, very far away. There were a lot of changes in this home because of moving in and out several times.

I stayed in that home until 1998 when I came to Canada.

(Lisa's reconstruction in English, based on research conversation transcript of November 20, 2002 in Chinese)

Mei lived in this second home during her formative years. This is the home she still misses from time to time while in Canada. *Mei* remembers this home as a bright and spacious place. She had her own bedroom initially. She had many friends, who lived nearby and probably went to the same schools.

Home as place and home as relationship are intricately intertwined in *Mei*'s experience of this home. Because of the changes among family relationships, *Mei* moved in and out of her bedroom, the living room and her parents' bedroom several times. In the process, her sense of this home also changed from feeling bright and spacious to feeling crowded but comfortable to feeling too crowded to accommodate her cousin. After her grandparents moved from the countryside to live with them, this home became quite crowded, but it was still comfortable. *Mei* moved out of her own bedroom and stayed in the living room while her grandparents moved into her bedroom. When her father went away and worked in Beijing for three years, *Mei* moved again, this time into her parents' bedroom and stayed with her mother. This place became really crowded after her father returned home and her cousin joined them. *Mei* moved back to her own smaller bedroom so that her grandparents and cousin could stay in the living room with a bigger space. But it was still too crowded. So her mother found another apartment near where they lived for her grandparents and cousin. It is interesting to notice that *Mei* emphasizes relationship more than place when she talks about her sense of this home - how her feelings about it changed as people came and went.

Mei lived with her parents in this home until she came to Canada in 1998. When she returned to China for a visit in the summer of 2000, her parents had already moved into a new home, where she felt like a stranger inside. It was a specially designed home, very bright and spacious with many windows. But it did not feel like a home to her, *Mei* told me. Sometimes she still misses her old second home.

Feeling homeless in this third home in China, *Mei* has been wondering where her own future home will be.

My Dormitory Life in Canada

Journal Entry: March 21, 2003, Edmonton

I chuckled when I read this part of *Mei*'s email message on January 2, 2003:

> Happy New Year to you! How are you doing? We are pretty busy on any kinds of party in these days. I don't know why we are really busy during this Christmas break. I didn't finish what I planned to do during the break. Maybe I am kind of busy and lazy, and I just started a little autobiography.
>
> (*Mei*, email messages, January 2, 2003)

I know for the past four years at the end of each term when they finish all their final exams and assignments, Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* are usually so exhausted that they don't want to do anything except sleep and relax to catch up their breath. So I was a little surprised when I learned that every single day of this Christmas break was filled with activities for them. Both Magnolia and *Mei* told me that they have been busy with parties since the beginning of this Christmas break. And I wondered if this partying every day with their friends was related to their sense that this might be the last Christmas break they would have in Canada, not knowing where they would end up after graduation this

spring. They just wanted to spend more time with their friends here in Edmonton. So I started our third research conversation on January 9, 2003 by asking *Mei* why she felt busy and lazy both at the same time. *Mei* responded:

> I didn't know why I had a party with friends every day. Too many parties. Sometimes I had to say no to my friends because my schedule was already full even before the new week started. I felt extremely busy. I felt lazy too because I stayed up late and couldn't get up in the morning. I usually slept until mid-afternoon.
>
> (*Mei,* research conversation transcripts, original in Chinese, January 9, 2003)

Even after 11 hours of sleep, *Mei* was still too exhausted to get out of bed, she told me. Now as the new term begins, she finds it difficult to readjust to her normal student's life. She can't go to sleep at midnight. When she finally falls asleep around 1 a.m. she can't get up in the morning now. It was an exhausting break for *Mei*.

In her written response to our research conversation transcript of November 20, 2002, *Mei* defines home in this way:

> 家，在我感觉上是一个可以发泄，可以放松的一个避风港。在家，不用去伪装，只要做回真实的自己，可以做自己想做的，说自己想说的，不用顾忌，考虑太多，因为家庭成员都会理解你，护着你。在你不开心的时候，他们会关心你，开导你。在你需要帮助时，他们会不顾一切地帮助你。我也一直觉得我的家在中国，在 Foggy City，那里有我的亲戚我的朋友，我的根在中国。
>
> Home, to me, is a place where I can vent my feelings, a place where I can relax. It is a shelter from the storms. When at home, one does not need to disguise, one can be one's true self. At home, one can do whatever one wants to, say whatever is on one's mind. One does not need to contemplate or consider too much because family members will understand you and protect you. When you are not happy, they will care for you and advise you. When you need help, they will help you by all means. I also feel that my home is in China, in Foggy City, where all my relatives and friends are. My root is in China.

我直到现在仍然想回国，回家，回到亲人的身边。有时我妈就说老了也不能指望我，离得太远了，我就感觉心酸，我还是希望能和亲人在一起，互相理解和支持，在那里我才能感受到家的温馨。

Up until now, I still want to go back to China. I still want to go home, to be near my loved ones. Sometimes my mother says that when she grows old, she can not expect much from me because I live so far away. My heart aches. I still wish that I can live with my loved ones. We can understand and support each other. There I can feel the comfort, warmth and fragrance of home.

(*Mei*, written response on research conversation transcript of November 20, 2002)

For *Mei*, home is a place where she can release her negative emotions and seek for relaxation and protection, comfort and warmth. At home, she is free to be herself, to do what her heart desires, and to say what's on her mind without worrying about being judged. Home is also a relationship where all her family members are. Their understanding, protection, caring, advice, help and support give *Mei* a sense of home. Since all her family members, relatives and friends are in China, *Mei* thinks her home is in China and she yearns to go home and stay close to her loved ones.

Like Magnolia, who thinks that she can have many homes in different places, but only one root in China, *Mei* also refers to her root being in China. I wonder how this connects with the notion of "root" and "route" (McLeod, 2000, p. 215) in the complex process of composing of our identities. *Mei* seems to think that her root is and will always be the important source of her identities. I wonder if her route, from where she was in China to where she is in Canada, also plays an important role in defining her identities.

Unlike Magnolia, who calls their current two-bedroom apartment her temporary home in Canada, *Mei* refers to it as a dormitory. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Simpson, 1989), the word *dormitory* comes from Latin *dormitori-um*

sleeping-place. It is a sleeping-chamber; more specifically, it is a room containing a number of beds, or a gallery or building divided into cells or chambers each having a bed or beds in it, for the inmates of a monastery, school, or other institution. For *Mei*, all those places she has lived in Canada since she first came in 1998 were dormitory, sleeping-place, not home. She described the first place she stayed in Canada as follows:

> When two boys and I first arrived in Edmonton on September 8, 1998, we stayed in our guardian's house. I was fearful. I lived in her daughter's room while they stayed in the basement. Later the rest of the group joined us on September 16. However, the guardian could only find one apartment, so her family moved into that rented apartment while the 10 of us filled her house. Magnolia and Jasmine shared her son's room, a bigger room next to mine. Four boys lived in the main bedroom and the other three stayed in the basement.
>
> I knew several of them. One was my grade 10 classmate and another was my junior high classmate. Jasmine and I actually lived in the same neighbourhood. I used to see her quite often. We went to the same elementary school and same junior high school, but different classes. I often met her on our way to school, but we never talked to each other. When she first arrived, I did not recognize her. Later when I saw her old pictures, I asked her, "Aren't you that little girl who..." She used to have long hair and had a nice hairdo. Her mother always made the hairdo. It was quite complicated. When I saw her again, she seemed to have changed so much, so different. I could hardly recognize her. The fourth person I knew was a boy I met when I studied English at Foggy University. He is the son of my father's friend.
>
> I was fearful of those boys' mischief and pranks. Our guardian's bathroom door could not be properly locked. So when Jasmine or Magnolia wanted to go to the bathroom, either of them would guard outside. When we went to sleep, we used our heavy suitcases to block the door.
>
> Sometimes at night I was disturbed from my sleep by someone, who broke into my room and used a long weed to wake me up. I was so frightened! They had nothing to do. There were only three girls. Sometimes the boys liked to play tricks on us. Magnolia and Jasmine felt better because they were together. But they blocked their bedroom door as well. Before that happened, we were in our pyjamas when we went to bed. After that, we all slept in our outfits because we were afraid.

> Some other boys were upright and honest. We chatted and got along quite well. It was a very interesting period of our lives.
>
> (Lisa's reconstruction in English, based on research conversation transcript of November 20, 2002 in Chinese)

Like Magnolia, *Mei* was also fearful when she lived in this place. Being so far away from her parents in a foreign country for the first time in her young life and staying in a house full of strangers, *Mei* was often alarmed and anxious (Tuan, 1979, p. 5). Even though she was in a better situation than Magnolia was because she recognized four familiar faces among the 10 students, she could not escape the boys' pranks either. There was no sense of relaxation or comfort for her in this house. When she went to the bathroom, she was worried that the door might be burst open because nobody guarded outside for her. She was frightened when she was woken up in the middle of her sleep by one boy breaking into her bedroom. Later, Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* all used their heavy suitcases to block their bedroom doors and went to sleep with their clothes on.

On September 30, 1998, *Mei*, Jasmine, Magnolia and two boys moved into a two-bedroom apartment near the high school they went to. *Mei* stayed in a smaller bedroom while Jasmine and Magnolia shared a bigger one. The two boys slept in the living room. *Mei* felt less fearful in this place because the two boys were not as mischievous as the others. And her sleep was no longer disrupted. However, the tension and conflict between these two boys often resulted in yelling and fist fights, which frightened Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* from time to time. On two occasions, police officers were called in.

Mei also told me with some amusement in hindsight about their present fast eating habit:

> Why we eat our food very fast nowadays is related to our first year experience living in that place. Since we all paid for our room and board for that year, our guardian delivered daily meals to our place. Sometimes we were not there when the meal arrived. When we returned, all the food was gone. The two boys finished the food. So we had to be at the table on time for our meals everyday. We three girls had to be quick to take our shares of the food. We would leave their shares for them. But if we didn't return on time, sometimes the other five boys in another two-bedroom apartment would come and finish our food if they were still hungry. So we had to eat really fast; otherwise, we would go hungry because we didn't go shopping or cook at that time. It was all included in our fees.
>
> The quality of the food was not that great, either. We would have a muffin or a square and milk for breakfast. It was OK for our girls, but the boys were still hungry. We had fried rice with green beans and eggs for lunch. We understood it was difficult to cook three meals for 10 students every day, but the food quality was not good. We girls could fill our stomach, but the boys were often hungry. So they were really angry and upset with our guardian because of this appalling living condition, which did not match at all with what they had imagined their life would be in Canada prior to their departure from China.
>
> (Lisa's reconstruction in English, based on research conversation transcript of November 20, 2002 in Chinese)

That place was also very dirty in *Mei's* memory. At first, Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* often cleaned the place, but the two boys did not care and dirtied the place very soon. After several cycles, they realized that there was no point cleaning it any more and they stopped doing it. When their guardian's sister visited them, these three girls were criticized for not keeping the place clean. On one occasion, their toilet was blocked. They tried everything they could to fix the problem, but in vain. Magnolia cried when they were blamed for causing the problem.

No wonder *Mei* felt this place was only a dormitory, not her home. With two angry, and often hungry, boys living amongst these three girls, there was no sense of relaxation or security for *Mei,* only anxiety and worry. She didn't know when a fist fight between these two boys would take place. She was worried that she would be hungry if

she did not eat fast enough. She did not like the dirty place she was in, but had to live with it. It came to me as no surprise when she told me how happy she was when her mother and other three parents came to Edmonton to visit them during the Chinese New Year in 1999:

> My mother, Jasmine's mother, the mother and the father of the two boys in our apartment all came here to visit us. They cooked meals and made breakfast for us. When they tasted the breakfast prepared by our guardian, they asked, "What is this food?" They felt sad. My mother brought two big packages of apples and other goods. The other parents brought smoked fish, sausages and many different kinds of our favourite food. We ate much better food during their stay here.
>
> (Lisa's reconstruction in English, based on research conversation transcript of November 20, 2002 in Chinese)

All 10 students' parents paid the very expensive fees for their first year in the hope that their children could eat well and study well in a far-away country without worrying about meeting their daily basic survival needs. They were very sad when they saw the poor living conditions of their children with their own eyes. Since they were the first student group under their guardian's care, they did not know that they needed to pass TOEFL test in order to go to university until just before the Chinese New Year. Therefore, in addition to food, their parents also brought them many TOEFL preparation materials from China. They had never heard of TOEFL and had no idea how to prepare for it. Neither did their ESL teachers in that high school. They struggled a lot with their English studies during that time period. Because there were too many people in the apartment, Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* usually went to a nearby Edmonton Public Library to study. Their place was too noisy when the other five boys came for a visit.

When I asked *Mei* about what stood out in her mind when remembering that apartment, her second dormitory in Canada, she said:

> I think it was the relationships among us, the students. Jasmine and one of the boys in our apartment used to have a very good family relationship. They even went to Beijing to study English together before coming to Canada. However, during that year, somehow their relationship deteriorated. They sometimes argued because of some misunderstanding and miscommunication. All the relationships among us were in a big mess at that time. They were very negative and tension-filled relationships.
>
> (Lisa's reconstruction in English, based on research conversation transcript of November 20, 2002 in Chinese)

Mei, Jasmine and Magnolia moved out of that apartment two months earlier before their first year's contract expired. They would rather pay for their rent and food for two extra months than stay in that uncomfortable place because the relationships were bad and the tension was unbearable. Due to fear, *Mei* sometimes moved her mattress into Jasmine and Magnolia's bedroom and the three girls stayed together. They were too young to know how to deal with two angry boys, who had no idea how to control their temper or deal with interpersonal relationships.

> At that time, Jasmine, Magnolia and I were not that close. Our relationship developed gradually over time. During that first year, Magnolia missed home very much. I knew she often cried. I felt O.K. at that time. I was very sad only when my mother was leaving Edmonton for home. When she came, I felt I was on the top of the world. I was very happy. I was full of sorrow when she left. I think it was a very hard year for Magnolia particularly because only her parents did not come for a visit in our apartment.
>
> (Lisa's reconstruction in English, based on research conversation transcript of November 20, 2002 in Chinese)

Like Magnolia, *Mei* also couldn't remember any happy days or events except when her mother was here during that first year. Most of the time she was anxious and worried, living in a tension-filled environment and wondering if she could pass the TOEFL test and go to university. *Mei* remembers clearly to this day how hard she and Magnolia

cried when they both struggled to make a choice between college and university because of the enormous financial implications for their families. At that time, they did not know or understand the difference between college and university. They thought that it might be easier to find a job if they had a university degree. So they chose to go directly to the university. In retrospect, they could have gone to a college for two years and then a two-year university transfer would have been less expensive.

On the last day of July 1999, *Mei*, Jasmine and Magnolia moved into a one-bedroom basement apartment, the third dormitory in Canada. At first, each of them did their own shopping and cooked their own meals. Day by day, Magnolia and *Mei* came together for their meals while Jasmine still cooked and ate on her own. *Mei* found it difficult to balance her relationship with Magnolia and Jasmine, who sometimes did not get along well with each other. *Mei* and Magnolia spent a lot of time together at that time because Jasmine had a boyfriend and she needed a lot of her own space and time to be with him.

In September 1999, *Mei,* Jasmine and Magnolia started their university life. In addition to taking courses in their respective interest areas – computer sciences, engineering and biology, they took an intensive ESL course together. So every day including Saturday they went to this class together.

Mei, Jasmine and Magnolia lived a relatively peaceful life in this apartment until their friend Rose moved in and joined them in January 2000. The place became overcrowded and dirty when Rose moved her desk next to the big window in the living room and put her mattress along the wall of the living room beside her luggage. It was

no longer comfortable living in that place. *Mei* felt it was not convenient because each had to wait longer to use the bathroom or to cook meals.

On June 1, 2000, they moved to a two-bedroom apartment on the third floor in another apartment building just opposite to their old place and have stayed there ever since. Jasmine has a smaller bedroom. *Mei* and Magnolia share a bigger bedroom. Rose makes a corner of the living room her place. They feel less crowded in this apartment. Since they live in separate bedrooms, the relationship between Jasmine and *Mei* and Magnolia is no longer that close. *Mei* feels reluctant to ask Jasmine too many questions for fear that she will be considered too nosey. Because of different class schedules, *Mei* and Magnolia sometimes have no idea if Jasmine is in her bedroom or not. She comes and goes so quietly that if they don't pay attention they don't know where Jasmine is! *Mei* feels uncomfortable not knowing how to communicate with Jasmine because she and Magnolia really want to help her. They know she is under a great deal of pressure from her mother to succeed in whatever she is trying to do.

Sharing a bedroom with Magnolia for two and a half years gives *Mei* a lot of opportunities to communicate with Magnolia and to know her better. In the process, their friendship develops and grows:

> At first, we were two strangers and didn't know how to live with each other. We often fought over trivial things. But as time goes by, we come to know each other better and now we really get along well.
>
> (Lisa's reconstruction in English, based on research conversation transcript of November 20, 2002 in Chinese)

With four students living together in this dormitory, *Mei* feels it difficult to maintain a clean and tidy place. Sometimes they clean the rooms, but very soon it

becomes dirty and messy again. Gradually they get accustomed to it and now they no longer care.

Mei also told me, over time, this two-bedroom dormitory has become a gathering place for her ESL classmates and other friends. Since four of them live together, it is much easier to invite their friends over to have parties and conversations in their spare time. Most of their friends are Chinese international students from Malaysia, Taiwan and Hong Kong. She feels really close to them.

In her last journal entry, *Mei* reflected about her life in Canada in the past five years and wrote:

> 在EDMONTON的日子也不短了，但是始终没有家的感觉，气候的寒冷干燥更迫使我想毕业后尽快离开这儿，总想着回国，回家过个年因为已有5个年头没在家过了，心总是属于中国的，尽管再脏再乱。
>
> My time in Edmonton is not short, but I never feel at home here. The dry and cold climate seems to force me to leave here as soon as I graduate. I want to go back to China very badly. I want to spend the Chinese New Year at home because for the past five years I was never able to do so. My heart is still in China even though it is a dirty and chaotic place.
>
> 这也可能是独生子女的坏处，有时也想过父母以后的生活，虽然还要一段时间，但是我--他们唯一的女儿，不能不时时刻刻想着他们。和父母在一起的时候是最开心，最温馨的时刻，和他们在一起才能有真正家的感觉。
>
> This might be the disadvantage of being an only child. Sometimes I think about my parents' future life. Although they are not old yet, I -- their only child -- cannot stop missing them all the time. The time when I am with my parents is the happiest, warmest and most comfortable. When I am with them I feel that I am home.
>
> 在这里过的只是大学的集体生活，大家都是一个人，要学会怎样去处理人与人之间的关系，要去互相关心互相照顾，但在某种意义上,这种关心照顾在父母的关怀比较下显得要吝啬得多,因为人都是自私的，但我们大家都应互相理解，我们能相处得这么融洽，在这么多来这儿的中国学生里是少之又少。我很荣幸能有这么好的室友，不仅在生活上互相帮助，更重要的是在精神上的互相支持，虽不是大家所说的温馨的家;但在某种程度上

可以说我们有一个温暖的宿舍，相信在大家毕业之后都会留恋这段不短的集体生活。

The life I live here is a collective university student life. We are all alone and we need to learn how to deal with interpersonal relationships, how to care for and take care of one another. To some extent, this kind of care seems miserly compared with the care from one's parents because one is selfish. But we should try to understand one another. There are so many Chinese students coming here to study, but very few like us who can get along so well for so many years. I am very happy that I have the good fortune to have such good roommates. We not only take care of one another in our lives, but also support one another emotionally. Although it is not a so-called warm and comfortable home, to some degree, we can say that we have a warm dormitory. I believe after graduation we will all miss this not so short collective life.

(*Mei*, research journal entry, March 19, 2003)

Mei never feels at home in Edmonton in all these years. Her heart is in China, where her parents are. Although she feels fortunate to live with three nice roommates, who can help one another whenever one of them has difficulties, the places they have lived do not give her a sense of home. For *Mei*, it is the reciprocal caring and supportive relationships that make a place home. She appreciates the feeling of warmth in her current dormitory, but it is not her home.

Mei is still in search for that new relationship with a wonderful young man she is going to meet and start her own home. But where will she make her home, in China or in Canada?

I want to return home in China

Journal Entry: June 5, 2003, Edmonton

Mei sent me an email message this afternoon:

> Hi, Lisa
> How are you doing? Thank you for coming to our convocation and sharing our happiness. In these four years, you encouraged us and helped us. I really appreciated your help. Thank you again.
> Regards,
> *Mei*
>
> (*Mei,* email messages, June 5, 2003)

I am glad that I went to Magnolia and *Mei*'s convocation ceremony three days ago. Because of the fear of spreading SARS in Canada, people in China have been discouraged from travelling to Canada for the past several months. And both their parents made the decision not to come to their convocation ceremony although their parents knew that this was a great achievement in the young lives of their children and wished that they could have come to witness the occasion with their own eyes. In my heart I am sure that their parents would feel very proud of these two young women. And I am proud of them, too. Despite all the obstacles, they have realized their first dream in Canada: to obtain a university degree. For the past five years, they have endured much more than they had ever imagined before coming to Canada. And in the process, they have grown and changed from two naive teenage girls to two more mature young adults.

Like Magnolia, *Mei* is also very aware of the changes that have taken place inside her. But she wishes that she had changed more and at a deeper level. During our group research conversation on November 29, 2002, when Magnolia talked about the fact that she no longer felt guilty about who she was and who she was becoming, *Mei* responded:

> *Mei*: In fact, I feel this kind of change is pretty good, not

necessarily a bad thing. On the contrary, sometimes I feel I haven't changed as much. I think maybe I don't adjust to the wider society here or to some aspect of it. I feel this way because many people tell me that I have been here for so long and yet I am only a little bit westernized. I think if I had come here at a younger age, 14 or 15 years old, I would have changed my way of thinking and dressing. And many aspects of my life, even my sub-consciousness, would have been westernized. But now I don't think I have changed a lot, which I feel is not necessarily a good thing. I think Magnolia is more ready to accept the western culture. (Magnolia's laughter.) I think you are beginning to accept it. I am not saying that you have already accepted it!

Magnolia: I am beginning to accept it?

Mei: Because you are starting to change slowly I think perhaps you are starting to accept this western culture. I think perhaps I am still rejecting it. I am still resisting against this western world. I think this might be the case.

Magnolia: Do you think that I have changed?

Mei: No, but I think every time, no matter what, you always say how the Canadians will think or do it. It seems that you always use their standards to evaluate and to judge.

Magnolia: Really? I don't feel it this way myself. Perhaps it is true. Perhaps.

Mei: Hmmm.

Lisa: Many people, no, many changes, you don't notice them yourself.

(Group research conversation transcript, original in Chinese, Nov. 29, 2002, p. 8)

Juxtaposing herself alongside Magnolia, *Mei* realizes that she hasn't changed as much as she would like herself to. As she contributes her rejection and resistance against the western world to her older age of coming to Canada and her unwillingness to accept the western culture, *Mei* notices the differences between herself and Magnolia and concludes that Magnolia is starting to think and do things the Canadian way, which Magnolia

agrees to somewhat reluctantly, while she is still clinging onto her Chinese way. I wonder if this is related to her experiences in Canada for the past five years.

Unlike Magnolia, who came to Canada with some ambivalence because her parents made the decision for her, *Mei* chose this opportunity herself to study overseas when her father asked for her thoughts on this matter. In her mind, western countries were very interesting. She dreamed to come overseas to see the wonderful outside world, a world she had been wondering about since her childhood encounters with those foreign visitors in the neighbourhood where she lived. She was very happy that her parents helped her to realize her dream. However, *Mei* remembered her father had warned her, "It won't be a chance for you to live in ease and comfort. You should try your best to go to university and learn something useful for your future life." It did not take too long for *Mei* to realize that her father's warning was very reasonable. During periods of difficulties, she sometimes regretted that she had come here for her studies. Her long-held romantic image of the western world slowly began to change. She still remembered the anxiety, the pressure and the nervousness she experienced when all her three friends - Jasmine, Magnolia and Rose - passed the TOEFL test and she was still taking it towards the end of her first year in Canada. She passed the test and was really happy for herself because she knew that was a very important step to realize her dreams in Canada.

Mei started to sense a big change in her life after her first trip to China in the summer of 2000. Two years felt like a long time, she told me, because so many changes could take place at home during her absence. At that time, she did not know why she was still homesick after just visiting her parents. She was puzzled by her feelings of pain. She knew her grandmother was very sick and her father was very worried, but she

did not expect that her grandmother would die of cancer in November, three months after she returned to Edmonton. To make matters worse, she got a very low mark for the first Physics midterm exam. She was very disappointed and worried that she might not get a high enough GPA to enter the Faculty of Business. She cried and cried, feeling very lonely. "If I were in China," *Mei* told me, "my parents would comfort me and my friends would help me." However, she couldn't tell them for fear that they would worry about her. Home, her family, was too far away.

One year later, *Mei*'s uncle died at the age of 50. Her decision to visit her mother during the Christmas break came to me as no surprise. She wanted to stay close to her mother and comfort her, as she had just lost her brother. Like her previous trip home, *Mei* filled her 21 days in China with many visits to her relatives and get-togethers with her friends and classmates. For *Mei*, home was more about the relationships she had with family and friends. These two sudden tragic deaths in her family made her more aware of the centrality of relationships in her life. Unlike Magnolia, who limited her regular contact with her parents, and occasionally her cousin, *Mei* maintained her web of relationships with her immediate family and close relatives through frequent long-distance telephone calls and with her friends in China via MSN chat rooms. She felt that she could communicate more readily and more easily with her mother than before because of those trips home and many hour-long conversations over the phone. She told me,

> Whenever I returned home, my mother said that I became more mature than before and that I was no longer a child and that my thinking also matured.
>
> (*Mei*, research conversation transcript, original in Chinese, November 13, 2002, p. 4)

Her mother treated her the way she would like to be treated as a young adult. Their conversation topics ranged from dating to her studies and her life. She felt free to share everything on her mind with her mother because her mother talked to her as if she were her friend. *Mei* felt happy and fortunate to have such a non-traditional and understanding mother because she knew that not every Chinese mother treated her child in this way. *Mei* felt much closer to her mother. *Mei* often went to MSN chat rooms to meet her friends, her former classmates in high school in China. And one of her close friends urged her to return to China after graduation so that they could work and live in the same city of Beijing. Because of this web of relationships, *Mei* experienced a much stronger pull from her home in China than Magnolia did.

Mei's closer relationships with her home in China also gave her a stronger sense of her Chinese identity, which was manifested in the Chinese name she preferred to call herself and in the difficulties she encountered trying to find a suitable English name. In early January 2003, I wrote *Mei* an email and asked her if she wanted to change her name *Mei* in my stories to a more English name May. I remembered when we were choosing those flower names for her, Jasmine, Magnolia and Rose for my master's thesis, *Mei* wanted it in Chinese because at that time she preferred her Chinese name. Lillian Blakey (2001) writes, "One's name is intimate, a cocoon that gives comfort, familiarity, and security in a world that can be hostile. It is with you all of your life…(p. 122)". *Mei* wanted to keep her Chinese name for that comfort, familiarity and security. But after her first trip to China and back here in Edmonton in the summer of 2000, she decided to use

Plum Blossom[13] as her English name and identified herself as such in most of the email messages she sent to me. So I was a bit surprised when *Mei* told me,

> I still prefer to use my Chinese name. I feel my Chinese name was given by my parents at my birth. It has been with me for so long. My English name is just a sign, representing me. But deep down in the root, I am still not Plum Blossom. I am still *Mei*. Why do I always change my name back and forth? Usually people do not change their names that often, do they?
>
> (*Mei*, research conversation transcript, original in Chinese, January 9, 2003, p. 3)

Mei still prefers to use her Chinese name. She told me that most of the time she couldn't remember if her first name or her last name should come first according to the Canadian custom when she first came to Canada and that the way the Canadians pronounced her Chinese name sounded so strange that it made her feel weird. That's not who she was, she said. And her confusion over her frequent name changes over the past five years indicates the difficulty she has experienced in defining who she was/is in Canada. She had a long story to tell about her names:

> When I came to Canada, I did not have an English name. My first ESL teacher did not know how to pronounce my first name because she couldn't make sense of the spelling. One day, however, I did not know why she called me a strange name. All my classmates thought it was really funny. Later I used only the second part of my first name. But my Canadian teachers could not pronounce that word, either. They sounded like a different Chinese character, similar to one of my classmates' name. My Canadian teachers could not tell the difference. It was really confusing. So my ESL teacher gave me my first English name M____. When I went to a senior's club in Chinatown, they asked me what was my name. I told them my name was M____. After several attempts, they still did not understand what I was saying. I felt really awkward. Then I decided to change my English name. But I did not know which one was a better English name. At first, I wanted Christine, but too many girls used that name. I did not like that. Then I decided to return to my Chinese name. So when I started university, I used the second part of my first name directly. In my university ESL class, most of my classmates were

[13] Plum Blossom, a pseudonym, is the English equivalent for *Mei*.

> from Hong Kong and they could pronounce my name fairly well. So it was not necessary to have an English name. Later, I wanted one. So I looked it up in a dictionary. After several hours, I decided on M___, very similar to the second part of my first name, but many people have this name. I forget how I decided on Plum Blossom. Oh, right, there were several names, e.g. Christine, Plum Blossom, etc. for me to choose from. My friends asked me to draw one and I picked Plum Blossom. At first I thought nobody used Plum Blossom, but later I found out that one of my friend's sister's name was the same! I still prefer to use my Chinese name. Many people do not know me as Plum Blossom. At first I only told them my Chinese name.
>
> (*Mei*, research conversation transcript, original in Chinese, January 9, 2003, p. 2-3)

However, *Mei*'s insistence on using her Chinese name sometimes came with a cost she was not willing to pay and she did not know how to deal with it yet. She felt distanced from her professors because they could not and did not try to address her by her Chinese name. She often experienced an awkward silence when greeted by her professors during office hours:

> Most of the professors here, like those who teach 400 level courses, will remember your name. But they seldom remember our Chinese names. When Magnolia and I went to ask our professor during office hours, we heard the professor call the Canadian student by his first name. When it was our turn, he did not say anything. He could not say our Chinese names or remember what our names were.
>
> (*Mei*, research conversation transcript, original in Chinese, January 9, 2003, p. 3)

"In our names are our selves," writes Deborah Tannen, (2001, p. 203) an American linguist. Our Chinese names are part of who we are. When naming us, our parents put their dreams, hopes and aspirations for us in our names. They are personally meaningful and significant. I understand *Mei*'s internal struggle between keeping her Chinese name and choosing an English name, a new identity for herself. It is an on-going struggle for us to come to terms with who we are and who we want to be in different contexts and

situations on this different landscape of Canada. I wonder how long it will take *Mei* to feel comfortable and confident enough to teach Canadians her Chinese name. It has taken me five years to reclaim my Chinese name and to have the courage (or rather, nerve) to teach people here how to say my Chinese name properly.

While *Mei* still cannot accept that Plum Blossom is her real name but that *Mei* is, she recognizes that there are some changes that are inevitable and beyond her control after having lived in Canada for five years:

> Having both Canadian citizenship and Chinese citizenship is not possible. From our deep heart, maybe we say we are Chinese; however, sometimes, we are not really Chinese, but have some feeling of Canadian. It's really hard to say.
>
> (*Mei,* email messages, January 6, 2003)

Legally, the Chinese government does not allow for dual citizenships. For *Mei,* emotionally and psychologically we are and will always be Chinese although we are slowly becoming Canadian too. *Mei*'s ambivalence about her identity is not only manifested in the struggle with her names, but also in her comfort and/or discomfort with both the English and Chinese languages. In our research group conversation, she talked about her puzzled feelings of discomfort when she looked at my typed Chinese transcript the first time:

Mei:	I don't know why. I feel it awkward to read the Chinese characters.
Lisa:	When you see the Chinese characters, you feel awkward?
Mei:	Right. It 's the feeling that I can't really express. But when I read English, I feel more comfortable. As for Chinese, I don't know why I feel a little bit awkward.
Magnolia:	Right. I remember the first time you gave me the typed transcript in Chinese and I showed it to *Mei*.

We were both laughing while looking at it. Do you remember? It looked... It felt... strange.

Mei: Right.

Magnolia: What I meant to say was not that it felt strange when I read it. It was just that first glance. There were so many Chinese characters crowding the whole page. Gee! It felt strange. But as for me, when I read I responded faster to Chinese. As soon as I read it, I could picture in my mind right away what was happening then and there and enter that world. As for English, I felt it easier for me to read. But I needed some time to think, to remember and to re-enter that world. I feel I read English more fluently and with more ease.

Mei: Right. Right.

(Group research conversation transcript, original in Chinese, Nov. 29, 2002, p. 7)

Having immersed themselves in the English language environment for the past five years, both Magnolia's and *Mei*'s eyes become more accustomed to the English alphabet than to the Chinese characters. They feel more comfortable with English than with Chinese, which has surprised them both. However, after the initial discomfort and strangeness of looking at the Chinese pages, they feel that their mother tongue Chinese still speaks to them more directly and faster than English. They can make sense of the Chinese pages without much effort whereas they need some time to think and to reconstruct meaning out of the English texts.

If "language is the home of our being" (Max van Manen, 1999, October, personal conversation), I wonder whether Magnolia and *Mei* will have a second home for their being when they master a second language - English. In Anne Winning's (1991) dissertation *The Language of Home and the Home of Language: Pedagogical*

Considerations for ESL Practice, she wrote,

> The home of the first language is what lends the foundation of the second language, just as the home of the first country informs the activity of home-making in the second country. Learners must come to feel at ease with the extent to which they can appropriate the language, yet they should also be open to the way in which the new language may nurture their becoming. A person cannot remain the same after learning another language (p. 87).

Thus, mastering a second language will allow Magnolia and *Mei* to become a different being... a new being that can mediate between their first country and second country, first language and second language.

For *Mei*, the English language continues to be a challenge. When responding to Keun-ho's article *The Experience of Studying in a Foreign Language* in her research journal, *Mei* wrote,

> The essay "The Experience of studying in a foreign language" is really critical and interesting.
>
> I strongly agree with Keun-ho's opinion. Studying at the U of A is not only a study of my major subjects but also a study of English. From my experience, if I want to take some biology, history or other courses, I need to spend twice or even three times as much time as my native-speaking Canadian peers in order to get a good grade. Thus, I will be exhausted if I take these courses. Consequently I prefer to take some physics, math courses instead of some interesting courses. It is kind of a pain. Study is really painful. I feel quite stressful when mid-term or finals come. It happened in China also. But it's kind of 麻木 (numb) because there were too many exams.
>
> I have the similar experience with Keun-ho about being on the margin. Last year, I took one required course. This class format was mainly group discussions. In my group, there were three Canadians and me. They always talked among themselves and I could not join them. I talked, but only about the subject that the professor gave us. I was afraid that they would not understand me. Sometimes I could feel that they even pretended that they understood me, which made me even more afraid of speaking.
>
> (*Mei*, research journal entry, January 5, 2003)

Mei was worried that she would have to spend three times as much time to study those more interesting courses with a high language demand and no prior knowledge. So she avoided them. Instead, she only selected those physics and math courses, which she was not really interested in. It has been a pain to force herself to study these boring subjects and to pass all the exams was also very stressful. Because of her lack of confidence in expressing her ideas in English, she remained silent and felt excluded from most of her class discussions with her Canadian peers.

Mei's sense of being on the margin is not just limited to the classroom setting. She feels that it is difficult to belong to a new country, a new society, or even a new classroom:

> When I came to Canada in 1998, I was curious about everything that happened here. I did not feel fearful before I came and even after I came to Canada because going abroad was my dream. But when I went to that Canadian high school, I was afraid of the study environment. There were some students wearing absurd clothes and they were not nice to us Chinese students. Sometimes they even stared at us impolitely. I felt scared and in my memory I only spoke very few words to the white Canadian students in this high school. However, the three ESL (TOEFL) teachers treated us really well and made us feel their warmth. Even right now, I do not have any white Canadian friends and I can feel the cultural gap between them and me. I like to talk with Chinese students and make friends with them because I think we have the same experience and can understand each other better. The blue sky, the fresh air and the comfortable living condition cannot prevent me from thinking about going back to China because there I have my family, my friends and my soul.
>
> (*Mei*, research journal entry, February 16, 2003)

Looking back, *Mei* recollected her first year in Canada. Initially she wanted to know everything about Canada and was not afraid of this foreign environment. She had dreamed about going to the western world for a long time. This was her dream come true. However, the negative interactions she experienced with some white Canadian

students in that local high school made her feel scared and not welcomed. Despite the warmth she felt towards her ESL teachers, *Mei* seems to have carried this fear with her until now. She still prefers to talk to her Chinese friends, among whom she feels that she belongs. For *Mei* home is the web of relationships she has with her family and friends in China. The external material and physical comfort of living in Canada will not satisfy her deeper spiritual and emotional need to belong. She longs to return to her home in China, a place for her soul.

Like Magnolia, *Mei* also had a language exchange experience with a Canadian student and spent the last Christmas Day with a Canadian family. However, it seems that these experiences do not have as strong an impact on *Mei* as it does on Magnolia. In mid-January 2002 when Dan[14], one of my fellow graduate students, wanted to find a language partner to practice speaking Mandarin, I introduced *Mei* to him. They met in one of the classrooms in the Humanities Centre for five or six weeks for conversations, once a week for an hour depending on how busy they each were with their courses and assignments. *Mei* remembered that Dan was very interested in communism and they talked a lot about that topic in English. Other topics were quite superficial, *Mei* later told me. When they both became very busy, their language exchange stopped. And I wonder how many meaningful and real conversations they actually had during this brief language exchange experience because Dan's Mandarin proficiency was quite limited.

On Christmas Day, *Mei* along with two other international students was invited to have a Christmas dinner with a young Canadian couple, who lived just one block away from her current apartment. *Mei*, another Chinese girl and a boy with darker skin colour

[14] A pseudonym.

whose origin *Mei* could not tell, arrived at 5 o'clock in the afternoon. The couple were in their 20s and were just married, *Mei* told me. They showed them their wedding pictures. The husband was a graduate student at the U of A and the wife had a part time job. They were planning to go to South Korea to teach English for a year and then return to Edmonton. *Mei* learned to play a game of juggling three bottles with her two hands just before dinner. She chatted with the other Chinese girl more during the conversations. After the traditional turkey dinner, they played some more games and the three guests left around 10 p.m. *Mei* and that Chinese girl became good friends and they still keep contact with each other through MSN chat rooms. I wonder how long it will take *Mei* to leave her comfort zone with her Chinese friends and venture out into the wider world to meet more Canadians and to start some meaningful relationships.

While Magnolia calls their current apartment her temporary home, *Mei* considers it as a dormitory:

> After classes, a classmate asked me, "Where are you going?" My answer was, "I'm going back home." Here, home is referred to the place where I live, but not my "real" home. I lived with other three Chinese girls about four years and a half. Can this apartment be my home? Actually I tried to think about it as a home, but I failed and it was not my home. Home is built and based on the contributions of everyone's love and care. If no one cares about this apartment, then it is just a dorm, a place I can rest and sleep, and nothing else. However, if one cares about you and loves you in this apartment, then it is your home. My home is in Foggy City, China. There I have my family who love me and care for me. My soul is located there.
>
> (*Mei*, research journal entry, March 16, 2003)

For *Mei,* this apartment is not her "real" home. It is just a dormitory where she lives, a place she can rest and sleep. Home is a special place in *Mei*'s heart and mind. It is the loving and caring relationships that give her a sense of home. Since all her meaningful

and significant relationships are in China, her home is in China and she wants to make her own home there:

> Now I start to feel that I want to make my own home. But at the same time, I want to be with my parents. Sometimes my mother jokes that if she is sick, she cannot expect me to do anything because I live oceans away and I am their only child. I was really sad when I heard this. She brought me up and sent me overseas to study, but I can not do very much in return. There is not much that I can do. So I want to graduate as soon as possible, get a job and establish myself financially so that I can do something for my parents. I want to spend as much time as I can with them.
>
> Sometimes, I still want to return to China. After all, if I am in China, I am closer to my parents. Last year, my mother was hospitalized because of her waist problems. My aunt went to the hospital and waited on her. So having brothers and sisters will help, but I don't have either. Who can take care of my mother when she is sick? My father is so busy. My mother had to lie on the bed. She could not get up to use the bathroom. It had to be done on the bed. So I want to return home.
>
> If I want to settle down here, they can come overseas. But it will be difficult for them to adjust to the life here. They cannot learn the English language all over again. What's more, all their friends are in China. And they are really good friends. They can spend time together. They won't feel lonely. If they come here, I work during the day and I will not have as much time to keep them company.
>
> (*Mei*, research conversation transcript, original in Chinese, January 9, 2003, p. 4-5)

To return to China or to stay in Canada, this is a question that is on many international students' mind. Because of her close relationship with her mother, *Mei* feels torn between making her own home in Canada and staying near her mother in China. As the only child, she wants to take care of her parents in their old age. If she settles down in Canada and her parents come to join her here, *Mei* foresees the loneliness that her parents will experience because of the language barrier and the web of relationships they will leave behind in China. Ultimately, *Mei* will probably return to China and make a

physical place to live there since her home is clearly already in China. She will just enter back into that web of relationships that is already her home.

But right now, she can push this nagging question aside for a while because she will stay in Canada for another two or three years. Two weeks ago, both Magnolia and *Mei* were admitted into their master's program at the U of A. So they are on their way to realize their second dream: to obtain their master's degree. *Mei*'s new goal now is to finish her master's program as soon as possible. She may apply for landed immigrant status or return to China to work and to live near her parents.

Salmon 的故事和我们这群小留学生的经历很相似，不过我们并没有salmon 那种不惜一切代价也要回到故乡的劲头，至少不是每个人都有。Lisa在文章中也意识到了这一点，她认为是中国的生活和工作条件较差造成留学生们不愿意回国。其实，就我个人来说，生活和工作条件固然重要，但那并不是我最在意的。虽然近年来中国的经济发展速度很快，但是中国实在是太大了。少数的沿海地区经济的确发达，但是内陆和西部却很落后，要提高全国的整体水平还需要很长一段时间。这次回国，我和父母从广东省旅行到广西省，一路上我亲眼所见的地区间的贫富差距让我感触很深。我感觉自己热血沸腾，真的想立刻就投入到开发和建设中去。可是，就凭我现在所学的知识是微不足道。我想我的目标更明确了，我一定要在工程领域继续深造，硕士，博士，博士后，直到我感觉自己有足够的知识和能力，我会回中国。中国的政治体制也是影响留学生回国的原因，政治体制不稳定，来一场政治运动，任谁也不敢回国参加经济建设。[15]

(Jasmine, Response to Prologue, January 11, 2003)

Chapter Six Jasmine

I am homeless here!

Journal Entry: November 30, 2002, Edmonton

Early this term, Jasmine wrote me an email, telling me that she is job hunting. She wants to find a job after her graduation from the U of A to gain some work

[15] English translation: The salmon story is very similar to our experiences as a group of young overseas students. But we don't have salmon's determination or drive to go home at all costs, at least not everyone has them. Lisa also realizes this point in the story. She thinks that it is the lower living and working conditions in China that have caused many overseas students to be unwilling to return to China. In fact, as far as I am concerned, the living and working conditions are important, but they are not what I care the most. Although the economic development in China has sped up in recent years, China is such a big country that only the few coastal areas have developed strong economy. The inland provinces and western part of China still lag behind. It will take a very long time to raise the overall level of development nationwide. During this trip to China, I travelled with my parents from Guang-Dong Province to Guang-Xi Province. On the way I was shocked to witness the huge gap between the rich areas and the poor areas with my own eyes. It touched me deeply. I feel as if my blood were boiling. I really want to plunge myself into the development and construction right away. However, with the little knowledge I have learned so far, there is not much that I can do. I think my goal becomes more clear: I want to study further in the engineering field. I want to finish my master's, my Ph. D and my postdoctoral work. When I feel that I have enough knowledge and ability I will return to China. The Chinese political system is another factor that prevents overseas students from returning to China. If the political system is not stable and if another political campaign comes, nobody will dare to return to China to join the economic construction.

experience and at the same time to find out what will interest her the most. Right now, she does not have a clue what her real academic area of interest is. So she wants to work for a year or two and then go to graduate school. I have helped her with her resume through emailing attachments back and forth. She brought a cover letter to our first research conversation in the Kiva Room on November 12, 2002. We read it through and made some changes. Knowing that it is very difficult for international students to find a job in Canada, Jasmine is also applying for graduate schools in Canada. She wants to stay in Canada after her graduation because ultimately she intends to immigrate to Canada. I assumed she would make her future home in Canada. I was greatly surprised when she told me otherwise:

> In fact, my father wants me to work in South City[16], where he has worked and lived for the past ten years. My mother has retired from her job in Foggy City and a company in South City is hiring her to be their accountant-in-chief. So my parents are thinking about the possibility of moving our home to South City. My father misses me a lot. He wants me to return to South City and work there in the future. My mother also mentions this to me. She wants me to get my master's or doctoral degree and have some work experience here first before returning to China. In this way, I will have a more favourable career prospect in China. My own plan is that I will return to China after I am 40 years old. Before the age of 40, I want to work full time and study part time here in Canada. I want to work in a company. After 40, I want to become a university professor in China. I want to teach my Chinese students whatever I have learned from both my studies and practical work experiences here in Canada.
>
> (Jasmine, research conversation transcript, original in Chinese, November 12, 2002)

[16] A pseudonym.

It is no wonder that Jasmine feels homeless right now. Her parents plans to relocate their home from Foggy City, where Jasmine was born and grew up and lived until she came to Canada in 1998, to South City, where her father has lived since 1991. For Jasmine, she used to have a home in Foggy City. However, when she returned in the summer of 2001 to visit, her parents had moved into a new house, where she only stayed for a week before Edmonton. It was a very comfortable place and she liked it, she told me, but she felt strange in that new home. It was no longer her home, she thought, it was her parents' home. South City has been her father's home for more than 10 years, but it is not Jasmine's home, either. She visited South City in 1992 when she was only twelve years old. South City was one of the Special Economic Development Zones designated by the Chinese government to test and experiment with the idea of market economy in China in the early 1990s, which attracted a huge influx of people from all over China and transformed it from a small fishing village into a modern medium-sized city within several years. In her memory, South City was a very open city compared with Foggy City in terms of its architecture and people. There were all sorts of people from every corner of China. The culture in South City was dynamic and complex because the majority of its new residents were migrants from other parts of China at that time.

Jasmine feels that she no longer wants to return to Foggy City to spend the rest of her life there. "It will be only a place for me to visit my family and relatives and friends," she said. And South City seems too strange a place for her to consider it as her home right now. She feels homeless in China. Since she has no idea if she can stay in Canada or not after graduation, she feels homeless in Canada as well. In her first research journal entry, Jasmine wrote:

刚刚和Lisa谈了有关"家"的话题，我又重新考虑了我的家到底在哪里，其实，我是没有家的。我现在所住的公寓，只是一个提供我吃饭，睡觉的地方，从感情上说，它不是我的家。我以前在中国所居住的公寓，是我从前的家，是我父母的家，也不是我现在的家。其实，我觉得我是排斥"家"的，因为它是一个避风港。我是有惰性的，我会事事都依赖它，这样不好的，不是吗？当然，如果受到挫折和打击的时候，可能会需要一个得到安慰的地方，但是朋友也可以倾听你，帮助你，为什么需要一个"家"？

English translation: I just talked with Lisa about the topic of home. I am thinking again where on earth my home is. In fact, I don't have a home right now. The apartment I live in now is only a place for me to eat and to sleep. Emotionally speaking, it is not my home. The apartment where I lived in China in the past was my previous home. It is my parents' home. It is not my present home either. I think I reject home because home is a shelter from the storm. I am a very dependent person. I will depend on it for everything, which is not good, is it? Of course, when one experiences setbacks and difficulties in life, one may need a place to get comfort, but one's friends may also listen to you and help you. Why does one need a home?

(Jasmine, Research journal entry, November 12, 2002)

Jasmine considers her current two-bedroom apartment as a place just to eat and to sleep. Although she has lived there with her three Chinese friends for more than two and a half years, it is not her home because she is not emotionally attached to it. The old apartment she had known as her home in China was gone when her parents moved into their current new home last summer. Jasmine cannot readily call this new place as her home because she only stayed there for a week. Feeling homeless both in Canada and in China, Jasmine questions whether she needs a home or not. For her, home is a shelter from the storm. The protection, comfort and security of a home may prevent her from becoming an independent person. She prefers to go to her friends for comfort and help when she experiences setbacks or difficulties in life. I wonder why Jasmine feels that she rejects home. I wonder why she thinks that her friends can replace her home.

Unable to see her immediate future road ahead, Jasmine tells herself that she will return to China and become a university professor after the age of 40 and before that she will work and study to learn as much as possible to prepare herself for what she considers a noble career: teaching. Like Magnolia, Jasmine also wants to travel to different places and to experience different things in North America. She does not want to stay in one place for too long. Even for her future work and studies, she wants to stay in one place for a while and then move on to another one. She thinks that her freedom to go wherever she wants is related to her being a student, being single and having no sense of direction right now. When I mentioned their 2008 Olympic reunion in Beijing, she laughed and said:

> In five or six years' time, I hope I will be working and studying at the same time. I hope I will have had a boyfriend by then. Whether I will be married or not is not that important, but I hope I will have a boyfriend. I hope I will be still in North America, here.
>
> (Jasmine, research conversation transcript, original in Chinese, November 12, 2002, p. 7)

Jasmine, Magnolia, and *Mei* all predicted that by 2008 each one of them would have been married and have had one child. They agreed that whoever cannot reach this goal when they meet again in Beijing will pay for their reunion dinners. Knowing that none of them had a boyfriend yet, I chuckled and asked Jasmine how she was going to find hers. Although in her fourth year, she had many projects that required two or four students to work together to complete and thus had more contact with Canadian students, she said, it was not possible for her to find one among her peers. She wanted to find someone older, someone she would admire and someone she could learn from to improve herself. She

hoped that she would meet him, preferably a Canadian-born Chinese, after she started working. She assumed that her future social circle would be larger than when she was a student. She admitted that she had been quite passive and reluctant to take part in all kinds of parties and activities around campus to meet new people for the past four years.

I wonder how long it will take Jasmine to find her boyfriend in Canada. When she finds him, will she have a home? Will her boyfriend replace her need for a home?

My homes in Foggy City

Journal Entry: December 30, 2002, Edmonton

Jasmine is coming back to Edmonton tomorrow. She left for South City, China on December 18 to meet her parents there. According to their plan, her mother would fly from Green City to South City on the same day to join her at the airport and her father would go there to meet them both. Jasmine was very excited about this trip, her second one back to China, although she would only spend 10 days with her parents. They would travel together in the southern part of China. In her memory, the three of them have seldom done that before. I am sure Jasmine will have many stories to tell about this trip when she comes back. I had better concentrate on the research conversation transcript of November 19, 2002 and start to make some sense of what she was telling me about her homes in China.

Jasmine was born and grew up in Foggy City, her parents' hometown. She remembered she was happy when she lived in her first home.

My first home: the piano and the smell

Our home, my first home, was located near a railway

station and a seaport in the west side of Foggy City. Across the street from our home was a fish-drying place, a part of a factory that manufactured dried fish products. So often there was a strong smell of fish in my home.

This home was on the second floor in a five-storied apartment building in the midst of rows and rows of similar apartment buildings. It was about 30 square meters. There was a kitchen, a balcony and two bedrooms. There was a *da kang*, a big bed (a special bed made of bricks and connected to the stove to keep people warm during the night in winter), in the bigger bedroom, where I slept with my parents during cold winter months. When I was four or five years old, my maternal grandparents came to our home to stay for a while because their house was torn down and was to be rebuilt. When they came, I slept with them on this special bed. And my parents slept in the smaller bedroom. At that time, Japanese comedy was very popular in China, and my hair was even cut the same style as a Japanese actress. My maternal grandfather picked me up from the kindergarten every afternoon. He was very proud of me since I looked like a cute Japanese girl.

We did not have a toilet in our home. On each floor, all the toilets were outside in a special hallway, where there was a public water tap and sink and each household had access to a door and inside the door was their designated toilet. The number on the toilet door was the same as the number on our apartment door. In the middle of the night, we had to go outside of our home to use the bathroom.

I did not play with the children in my neighbourhood. My parents were worried that I might lose my way if I went outside because the neighbourhood was not very safe for a child. It was near the railway station and the seaport. A lot of strange people came and went. My parents preferred to lock me up in my home. However, I could watch cartoons and read children's books as many as I wanted. My father usually took me to a movie every Sunday afternoon while my mother was cooking at home. I can still remember one particular movie, a story about a boxer because both my father and I enjoyed it very much. Those were the happiest memories I have shared with my father, who always bought me ice-cream. When looking back at that time period, I can always think of ice-cream. When I was seven, my parents bought me a

piano. I practised playing piano every day. My mother did not allow me to watch too much TV any more. She said that it was bad for my eyes and that these cartoons were too childish to do me any good. Instead, she asked me to practice my piano a lot.

Every weekend my family and my younger aunt's family started to visit my paternal grandparents and it became a rule. My uncle and my older aunt stayed with my grandparents until 1996. So it was our weekly family reunion. My piano teacher happened to live near my grandparents'. Every weekend, after I took my piano lessons from my teacher, I went to my grandparents' home and played with my cousins. I played badminton, rode a bike, and climbed mountains with them. Looking back, I miss that time period very much because the time I spent in my grandparent's home over the many weekends was the happiest in my memory.

I lived in this home from when I was born till grade three. I was very happy because there was no academic pressure in that elementary school, which was very close to my home. There were a lot of good memories between me and my family. I got along very well with people and I was popular at school. I was an extrovert then and I joined many activities and always got good results. I was even selected as a student leader in my class.

When I was in grade three, I transferred to another elementary school near where my father worked. This school was far away from our first home, but close to our second home, where we moved in when I was in grade five. So during my three years from grade three to grade five in that elementary school, everyday my father took me to and from school on his bike before and after his work. There was a long uphill road from my home to my school. Every morning, I would cheer for my father so that he could ride me to school without any stops in between. In that school, I was no longer a student leader. I was still popular, but in a slightly different way. I was always one of the top three students in my class and all my teachers liked me. I took active part in many school activities. I remember because of my good handwriting, my teacher often asked me to write on the blackboard using a white chalk. She asked me to copy the questions for her on the board. My grades were very good at that time. My math and Chinese composition were both good. I was happy then.

(Lisa's reconstruction in English, based on research conversation transcript of November 19, 2002 in Chinese)

Situating herself in present-day Edmonton, Jasmine travels back in time to her first home in China. The first thing she remembers of this home is the strong fishy smell from a nearby factory and her sense of a crowded and busy place with rows of apartment buildings. It was also a dangerous place for her as a young child as travellers passed through the neighbourhood to catch their trains or ships. As a consequence, Jasmine spent most of her after-school time at home alone and practiced playing the piano. Her happy memories of this home are associated with those weekend visits to her grandparents when she could play with her cousins. Because the second elementary school she attended was far away from her first home, every day her father took her to school on his bike before work and picked her up after work. I can only imagine how happy Jasmine must have been sitting at the back of her father's bike, travelling to and from school and chatting with him along the way for three years. She was happy at school too because she was doing very well academically and getting along with her classmates. Although this home was located in a neighbourhood not safe for a child to play outside, Jasmine's positive relationships with her family and relatives, especially her cousins, and her teachers and classmates in the two elementary schools have turned this sometimes lonely home into a happy place in her memory. Jasmine was happy with who she was. However, things started to change drastically when she moved into her second home in a nicer neighbourhood.

My second home: the big change

When I was in grade five, the last year in an elementary school in Foggy City, we moved into our second home in the south side of Foggy City. There was

a mountain covered with green trees nearby. This home was in a newly-developed residential area with a much nicer living environment. The air was fresh. There was a big garden with a variety of flowers in front of each of the apartment buildings and there was quite a distance between two apartment buildings.

This home was also on the second floor in a five-storied apartment building. There were three households on one floor. This home was bigger, about 50 square meters. There was a kitchen, a balcony, a living room, and two bedrooms. The piano was placed right at the entrance.

I had a room of my own and I lived in this home until I was in grade ten. I had much more contact with my neighbours. At that time, all the 15 households in our apartment building shared one meter for water and another for electricity. Each household took turns to calculate and collect the monthly fees. When it was our turn, I would go to each household to read the meters and then come back home to do the calculations. After I came up with the right amount for each household, I would knock on their doors and collect the money. In this way, I came to know all my neighbours in this apartment building.

I had many friends, who went to the same grade five class in the same elementary school with me in the neighbourhood. After school we often played badminton and went bike-riding together. I was no longer lonely. There was one boy, who lived upstairs on the fifth floor in my apartment building. We went to school together. We played together. He even taught me how to ride my bike. He often came to my home to listen to my playing the piano. I was happy to spend my time with him. When it was his birthday, I made a birthday card for him. I used green threads to weave a heart shape and stitched it onto the card. I put this card with my piano song book and my mother saw it. She was not pleased. She thought that I started my puppy love too early, but she never told me so until many years later. Just before I returned to Edmonton in the summer of 2001, we stayed in Beijing and she told me the truth. At that time she thought that I liked the boy and that I shouldn't like him at such a young age. She said that she was very angry with me, but she never said anything to me. I had no idea that my mother was upset with me because of this boy. He was just a friend to me! He was the only friend I had at that time and he happened to

be a boy! After that, it was very difficult for me to please my mother. She often found fault with whatever I was doing and lost her temper with me. My cousin (my older aunt's daughter) used to live in our home for a while during every winter and summer holiday. Often I was scolded because of the bad tasting dinner I cooked or the not so clean rooms I did. Sometimes my cousin was scolded as well. We shared some of those bitter experiences. My mother's temper was extremely bad at that time and I did not know how to please her. Every night after she came back from work, my cousin and I would hold our breath and find an excuse to go out after dinner. The only happy time for me then was those weekend visits to my grandparents' home, where I could play with my cousins.

I went to a key junior high school, which was the best in the city. I did not prepare myself or respond well to this big change in my life and things got worse and worse. I suddenly felt very uncomfortable towards my classmates. Only a few of my elementary classmates went to the same junior high school. I was not elected as a student leader and my grades started to drop and lag behind. I was not a STAR any more. The popular girls at that school were either academically strong or tall and pretty. I was none of them and I lost my confidence completely. I did not know how to talk to people and nobody (teachers and students) noticed me. I had very few friends and I became very quiet. My mother was busy with her work all day long. She was upset when she saw my grades dropping, but she did not have the time to help me analyse the situation, which became worse and worse. At that time, I did not like my mother very much since she was very rude to me whenever I got bad marks on my exams. The school teachers always asked the parents to sign on test papers and I hated it very much. I preferred to ask my father to do this job; however, he was never at home. With no choice, I had to show my mother the bad mark. Sometimes I asked her to sign my exam paper in the morning since she would not have much time to scold me. Only recently, my mother told me that there were some major changes in her career at that time. Although it got better and better after that, she was not always in a good mood then. And she brought her bad mood from her job to our home and to me. I was very unhappy during those four junior high school years. Although it was a key school in Foggy City, there were still bad aspects. Bad students would run after one another and fight in school. They would even threaten student leaders. Teachers did not pay

attention to it since they thought the students were still kids. However, we were not. A very bad male student hit a female student leader on the face when we studied by ourselves at school. I was scared to death. I told my parents after school and they did not listen to me just as the school teachers. I did not like to go to school and it was a nightmare to me.

I did not reach the minimum requirement score in my junior high school leaving exam in order to stay in the same high school for my senior years. Fortunately, the fact that I could play the piano helped me to get additional marks so that I could continue in this key high school. Because of that, my mother was even more disappointed about me and I thought that she even felt ashamed of me. I was no longer a beautiful white swan, but a small ugly duckling in my junior high school.

I only stayed in that senior high school for two months and I was unhappy. Later my mother told me that there was an opportunity to send me to a boarding school. I was very happy then because I wanted desperately to get out of that situation.

(Lisa's reconstruction in English, based on research conversation transcript of November 19, 2002 in Chinese)

Compared with her first home, Jasmine seems to have liked this second home much better because of its fresh air and beautiful and spacious surroundings. More importantly, she had come to know all her neighbours through the monthly collection of utilities bill payment. It was not a dangerous place, but a safe, clean and beautiful neighbourhood, where she had many friends. They went to the same elementary school and played together after school. She was so happy that finally she had a friend after all those lonely years that she made him a heart-shaped card for his birthday. Unfortunately, her mother misinterpreted her action and was really upset with her. In China, dating was discouraged even at the university level at that time, let alone at the primary level! It was forbidden. Parents in China believed that dating would distract their children from

concentrating on their school work and as a result, their grades would drop. However, Jasmine's mother never talked about her anger with her until 10 years later. To make
Jasmine's mother never talked about her anger with her until 10 years later. To make
matters worse, her grades started to drop when she entered that key junior high school. Among a class full of academically strong students, Jasmine did not feel comfortable and she lost her self-confidence when she was not elected as a student leader. Up until grade five, she had been successful at school. She called herself an extrovert then. But slowly Jasmine turned into an introvert with very few friends at this junior high school. At home, she was not happy, either, because her mother was very rude to her whenever she got bad marks on her exams. Although this second home was bigger and in a nicer neighbourhood, the tensions Jasmine experienced with her classmates at school and with her mother at home made this place almost unbearable. To some extent, Jasmine has not had a home since she entered her junior high school. Not happy with who she was at home or school, Jasmine was greatly relieved when her mother sent her to a boarding school in the countryside after the first two months in her senior high school.

My dormitory in a boarding school: I am free

When I was 15 I went to a public boarding high school. This school was located in the countryside, one hour bus drive from Foggy City. It was a very strict school. Our daily schedule was very tight. Every morning we got up at 5:30 a.m. to do some jogging. We did some self-study before having our breakfast in the big school canteen at 6:30 a.m. After breakfast we went to our classrooms and our morning classes started at 7:30 a.m. We had lunch at 11:30 a.m. and went back to our dormitories for a nap. Our afternoon classes started at 1:30 p.m. and ended at 5:30 p.m. After dinner we had to stay in our classrooms for self-study between 7 and 9 p.m. We went to bed around 9:30 p.m.

We were required to live and stay in the school all year round except the winter and summer holidays, when we could live at home. Every Sunday we had only four

hours available to ourselves because we had school Monday through Saturday. Even on Sundays we had self-study in our own classrooms. I could either go home and study in our own classrooms. I could either go home and stay there for two hours or my parents could visit me at school for four hours. That was part of the life of staying in a boarding school. I did not have too much sense of a home at that time because I stayed in the school all the time. Besides, every week I could see my parents. I was happy to live at the boarding school. I had a lot of freedom.

We lived in a dormitory like a big classroom. As soon as you entered the room, there was one single bunk bed, one upper bed and one lower bed. Along two walls there were ten bunk beds tied together. Three of us slept on two beds. There were 40-50 students in one room. It was very noisy during the night, but there were teachers who came and supervised us. Women teachers took care of the girls' rooms and nobody dared to speak loudly.

We took turns to sleep on this single bunk bed. Sometimes it was assigned to two of us by our teacher. There were many dormitories like this one. We often had to change dormitories. One year we slept in this dormitory, another year we moved to another one. I remember one year was particularly miserable because there were only three windows alongside one wall. The other wall was along the hallway with no windows. And there was another dormitory across the hallway, where another 40-50 students slept. The ventilation was very bad and in summer it was really hot. The most unbearable thing was that we only could take showers twice a week in the hot summer months.

I lived in a two-storied building. There were also one-storied buildings. The design and furniture arrangement were the same in every dormitory. When we graduated in 1998, new dormitories were being built. It was said that eight students would share one room. But we never had the opportunity to see them with our own eyes because we had already graduated.

I went to that boarding high school because its rate of going to university was very high. I liked the school atmosphere since no students dared to fight at school. Instead, teachers could beat students here. I heard a joke about this practice: "The school headmaster can beat teachers and teachers can beat students." I never

saw the first part of the joke, but I saw the second part everywhere. Fortunately, I was a female student and I could safely pass my time there. There were a lot of strange rules in that school. For example, in spring and summer, we were asked to catch mice in our dormitories and to catch a certain number of flies to hand in every week. They made this rule in order to keep the whole school clean. We had mice in our dormitories. They came to our beds and ate our food.

Although I did not like some aspects of that school, I really appreciated the time I had spent there. I began to understand my mother and found out that she really cared for me and loved me. At that time, her career was relatively stable and she could spend more time in caring about me and understanding me. She no longer cared too much about my marks in that high school because the majority of the students there were academically very strong. Instead, she always encouraged me to try my best. She came to visit me every weekend. Perhaps she was happy that I could survive or even enjoy my life under such unbearable living conditions and strict school regulations and rules there, which might help me to win some marks in my mother's heart. I was happy, too. I made many female friends. The majority of the girls in that school were from the countryside. I found they were very easy to get along with. I had some freedom to deal with my own feelings and thoughts without her control.

Because I did not feel pressured and I studied very hard every day, my marks on the exams became better and better. As a result, I gained my confidence back. Actually, I did not care very much about the living conditions and strict rules in that school. Looking back, I think that was a good experience for me. Besides we did have the chance to watch some movies every two weeks in that school, which I enjoyed very much.

(Lisa's reconstruction in English, based on research conversation transcript of November 19, 2002 in Chinese)

Located in the countryside, the living conditions in that boarding school were awful. The students had to follow a very rigid and tight daily schedule with little free time to themselves. There were 40-50 students sleeping on bunk beds tied together in one huge

classroom-like dormitory with only three windows. In the summer months, it was really hot, but the students could only take showers twice a week. There were mice and flies in their dormitories. Although Jasmine did not like this crowded and dirty place and many of the strange and strict rules of that school and the teachers in that school, she really appreciated her time there. She was able to sort out things and feelings on her own. She started to understand her mother and to see her in a different way. Their relationship had a positive turn. She knew then and there that her mother really cared for her and loved her. She went to the school every weekend to visit Jasmine and always encouraged her to try her best. Not feeling pressured, Jasmine studied really hard every day. Gradually her grades improved and she regained her self-confidence. Because she was happy in that boarding school, Jasmine did not mind the poor living conditions or the strict rules there. Home, for Jasmine, is defined by how she is allowed to be, which is quite different from Magnolia and *Mei*'s definitions of home. For her, the dormitory could be the home because she was free to be and to figure things out by herself. For *Mei*, a dormitory had nothing to do with home because there were no relationships. In fact, that boarding school dormitory experience prepared her well for her student life in Canada, Jasmine told me. She came to Canada in September 1998 and has lived in several apartments with her friends ever since. When she returned to Foggy City in 2001, after three years in Canada, her parents had moved into this new apartment, her third home in China.

My third home: I like it, but...

My parents moved into this new home in the north side of Foggy City in the summer of 2001, just before I returned home for my first visit. I know this neighbourhood quite well because of those weekend visits at my grandparents'. My parents want to live

nearby to take care of my grandparents. It is a beautiful residential area, originally designated by the municipal government to build single houses for overseas Chinese returning and living in Foggy City some 50 years ago. There is a mountain nearby, only five minutes walk from the neighbourhood. In front of each house, there is a garden with very tall evergreen trees surrounding it as its fences.

My grandparents' home used to be in one of those old three-storied apartment buildings at the heart of this neighbourhood. Those old buildings were torn down recently and in their place now stand six new 10-storied-high apartment buildings. Our new home is on the fourth floor in one of these new high-rises. It is about 100 square meters. There is a kitchen, a balcony, two bathrooms, one living room and three bedrooms. We cook in the balcony because the gas stove is there. My grandmother's new home is just across from ours. When her old home was torn down and before her new home was ready, she lived with my mother in our second home. My mother lives alone now in our new home because my father works in South City. My aunt and her family have moved into my grandmother's new home because my grandfather passed away and they want to take care of her.

I like this new home. It is bigger than the previous two homes. There is a *tatami* in my room, a Japanese-styled small bed. I like it very much. But I only lived there briefly. I travelled in Shanghai and *Hangzhou* for the first ten days. When I returned to Foggy City, I had to stay in my cousin's home for several days because this new home was being decorated. I only stayed in this new home for a week and then I came back to Canada. I felt this home was my parents' home, not mine any more.

(Lisa's reconstruction in English, based on research conversation transcript of November 19, 2002 in Chinese)

Jasmine likes this new home because it is located in a very beautiful neighbourhood in Foggy City. It is much bigger than the previous two homes. It has two bathrooms and three bedrooms. She likes the Japanese-styled small bed in her bedroom. However, she only stayed there for a week during her first trip to China in 2001. She no longer feels

that this home is her home. She feels more like a visitor in this new home.

When I asked Jasmine which home would come to her mind the minute she heard

When I asked Jasmine which home would come to her mind the minute she heard

the word *home*, she said that it was Foggy City. Her answer surprised me. I wonder why she considers Foggy City as her home in China instead of the first two homes where she spent her formative years. Will the city of Edmonton become her home in Canada now that she has lived here for four and a half years?

My dormitories in Edmonton

Journal Entry: January 14, 2003, Edmonton

Earlier this month, Jasmine emailed me that she caught a bad cold during the second half of her travel in China, that she still felt sick when she returned to Edmonton and that she would meet me as soon as she finished her registration for this term. I emailed back, telling her to take her time. I am meeting her tomorrow afternoon and I haven't finished my writing of her experiences of the several dormitories she has lived in since she first came to Edmonton.

I find it interesting that both *Mei* and Jasmine refer to the apartments where they have lived in Edmonton as their dormitories, not their homes. Since Jasmine has had some boarding school experiences in China, I wonder how similar and/or different her experiences of those dormitories in Canada might be for her compared with *Mei*'s. Right at the beginning of their life in Canada, Jasmine seems to have had a very different sense of their first place - their guardian's home from both Magnolia and *Mei*:

> When we first came, we lived in our guardian's home for two weeks. It was a house with two levels and a

basement. There were three bedrooms. Magnolia and I shared a room. We slept on a bunk bed. *Mei* lived in a smaller room. There were two bunk beds in the master's bedroom and four boys slept there. The other three boys lived in the room in the basement with two bunk beds.

I know one of the boys. *Mei's* face also looked familiar. It turned out that we lived in the same neighbourhood and we met each other regularly on our way to and from school, but we never said hello to each other.

I found it easier for me to live with them because of my boarding school experience. No one else had the boarding school experience and they had a hard time adjusting to it, especially those boys. Perhaps because they are each the only child of their families they were spoiled at home in China. They had frequent frictions between one another. I remember after we moved in several days, two boys had a quarrel and were ready to fight. They did not damage any of the furniture in our guardian's home, but both of them were bruised on the nose or on the face.

I liked staying in my guardian's home. That place gave me a sense of home. There were sofas and TV. It was decorated with warmth and fragrance of a home. It was in autumn when I lived there. At every sunset, I could see the wonderful colours in the sky: purple, red, dark blue and light blue. It was really amazing because I never saw that in China. I even took many pictures of the sunset. However, after I left my guardian's house, I hardly saw that amazing autumn twilight again. Maybe I was just not paying much attention any more.

(Lisa's reconstruction in English, based on research conversation transcript of November 19, 2002 in Chinese)

Although Jasmine only knew two of the ten students when they lived in their guardian's home for the first two weeks in Edmonton in September 1998, she did not feel as fearful as Magnolia or *Mei*. In fact, because of her three-year dormitory experiences in that boarding high school in China, she was the only one, who adjusted well into this very crowded place. The fights and frictions among the boys did not bother her as much. In

her memory, their guardian's house was the only place that gave her a sense of home, she told me. The furniture and the decorations reminded her of the warmth and fragrance of a home. How she felt about the city of Edmonton at that time was gone forever after they moved out of their guardian's home, she also told me. She felt as if she had lived in two totally different worlds. Her guardian's home was located in the southside of Edmonton in a residential area with many single houses. The streets around and the whole neighbourhood gave her a different feel for the city. It was a very clean and quiet area. In addition to the strong sense of warmth and fragrance of home when she lived in that area, the amazing colours in the autumn sky at sunset impressed and moved her so much that she took many pictures of them. I could sense that Jasmine really missed those two weeks. After they moved out and lived on their own, there was no sense of home at all in those apartments, Jasmine said. They were/are all dormitories to her. Those apartments were near busy streets or shopping centres. They were very noisy and crowded with some very basic furniture in them. Jasmine moved into her first dormitory in Canada on September 30, 1998 with Magnolia, *Mei* and two boys.

> When we moved into this two-bedroom apartment, Magnolia and I lived in one bedroom with a bunk bed. *Mei* stayed in another bedroom and two boys slept in two beds in the living room.
>
> The two boys who lived with us often had conflicts. There were many occasions that they did not like one another that much and wanted a fight. Once Magnolia cried because they had a fight around midnight when the rest of us already fell asleep. One of them dialled 911 and the police came. We were asked to be the witnesses. The police asked us if we had seen one of them hit the other. We did not know because we were all sleeping in our rooms. When the police knew nothing serious had happened they left. But on the wall of that apartment there was a big hole. One of the boys used a chair to hit the other. When the police

> came, *Mei* stood in front of the big hole and blocked their view.
>
> Despite those unpleasant things, there were a lot of good memories in that apartment as well. There was a health and fitness club in the neighbourhood. It had a swimming pool, a badminton court and a tennis court. Since we lived in the neighbourhood, we could go to that club one month for free. Therefore, all of us (ten people) went there quite often. We tried every game. After we moved out of that apartment, I hardly had any opportunity to do those physical activities any more.
>
> As a matter of fact, I miss that period very much not only because I can hardly see any of the boys (some of them went back to China, and some of them may still live in Canada) after we three girls went to University, but also because my friendship with Magnolia and *Mei* is not as close as it was then.
>
> I still remember clearly that we three girls went to the Legislature Building in downtown in early May in 1999. At that time we were studying in that local high school and there were no windows in our classroom. After a long winter, our first one in Canada, we could not wait to enjoy the sunshine when the weather turned warm in the spring. Magnolia, *Mei* and I lay on the grass, ate the snacks we brought, watched the sky, took pictures for each other, talked and laughed. I even wore a short skirt on that day.
>
> (Lisa's reconstruction in English, based on research conversation transcript of November 19, 2002 in Chinese)

Looking back, like Magnolia and *Mei*, Jasmine also remembers the tensions and conflicts between the two boys and the troubles they caused in these three girls' lives. Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* must have been very scared when the police were called in and they were woken up during their sleep to deal with another fight between the two boys. While acknowledging these were unpleasant experiences, Jasmine does not seem to have been bothered as much as Magnolia and *Mei* were. In fact, she has very fond memories of this time period because of her close relationship with Magnolia and *Mei* and many of the

group activities they participated together with the seven boys in a nearby recreation and leisure centre. She still misses the boys. She also remembers that warm spring day when she went to the Legislature Building with Magnolia and *Mei*. They enjoyed themselves there. Compared with their undergraduate studies later, they had much less pressure and worries during that first year, Jasmine told me. Their main goal was to pass the TOEFL test to go to the university. Although there were some conflicts among the 10 of them, they stayed together as a group and took part in many activities together. Jasmine felt that she belonged.

On July 31, 1999, Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* moved into a one-bedroom basement unit in an apartment building. They put three mattresses on the floor in the bedroom and found themselves each a desk and a chair for study in the three corners of the living-room. Jasmine remembers that they went to ESL and some math classes together. They were close, but there was also some competition among them because they took the same courses, especially those math courses, and everybody wanted to get a higher score. They did homework together and prepared for the exams together. They helped one another, but still there was this sense of competition, Jasmine told me. At that time, they also shared a circle of ESL friends from their ESL course. Many of them were Chinese descendents from Hong Kong and Malaysia. They often got together and kept regular contact with one another. Jasmine misses that five and a half months sharing one bedroom with Magnolia and *Mei* because their relationship was very close then. Shared living and sleeping spaces obviously allowed them the opportunity to build and develop their relationships with one another.

After Rose moved into this one-bedroom apartment in mid-January 2000, it became really crowded. So in June 2000, the four of them moved into a two-bedroom unit on the third floor in another apartment building nearby and have lived there for more than two and a half years now. Magnolia and *Mei* share the bigger bedroom; Jasmine has the smaller bedroom while Rose puts her mattress at one corner of the living-room. Jasmine seems quite puzzled by the fact that Magnolia and *Mei* are no longer close to her in this apartment. She often wonders why:

> I have lived in this apartment for more than two and a half years now. This is quite a long time. However, I can hardly find any valuable memory of it as my home there. Most of the time, I stay in the university and library. Even when I go home at night, I often stay in my room, surf the internet, or go to bed. If I do not go to Magnolia and *Mei*'s bedroom on purpose, I cannot even see them for the whole week although we live together.
>
> I wonder many times myself why I am not as close to *Mei* and Magnolia as before, but it is very hard to find the exact reason: maybe because we study in two different faculties in the university, maybe because I have my own room, or maybe we have to spend most of the time studying in the university.
>
> Magnolia and *Mei* are in the same faculty. I am in a different faculty. I have my own bedroom. Magnolia and *Mei* share one bedroom. They have more contact and they have more conflicts as well. But over time they get used to each other. Whenever they have a conflict of ideas or opinions, they would sort it out right away and achieve peace between them. Because they share one bedroom they have more opportunities to communicate with each other.
>
> I don't communicate with them that much. Because of the heavy course load, I am extremely busy day and night. I also feel I always have more worries than Magnolia and *Mei*. If they don't have those same worries as I do, how can they understand me if I want

> to communicate with them? I met Carl[17] in that local high school during my first year in Edmonton. I depended on him for emotional support for the first year. He is more a brother than a boyfriend to me. Whenever something occurs in my life, the first person I think about going to ask for advice is him, not Magnolia or *Mei*. I am very worried that if I tell them my feelings and thoughts how will they feel and react? Will they really care about me? Will they really want to help me solve my problems or will they just treat my story as a joke and brush it aside or laugh at it? Because of those worries, I reject the friendship with my girl friends. I feel whoever I can trust and tell what is really on my mind are my boy friends. Sometimes I cannot trust Magnolia and *Mei* completely and tell them what is on my mind because I am afraid that they will judge me. I feel it safer and more comfortable to tell my feelings and thoughts to those boy friends. I can tell them everything. But I keep everything to myself when I am with my girl friends.
>
> (Lisa's reconstruction in English, based on research conversation transcript of November 19, 2002 in Chinese)

Feeling isolated, Jasmine has hardly any valuable memories of their current apartment as her home. In her mind, it is clearly not her home. Because of the heavy course load in a different faculty, she spends most of her time, alone or with her classmates, on campus and in the library doing assignments and working on projects. She only returns to the apartment at night. However, when she is at the apartment, she stays in her own bedroom and surfs the internet, applying for graduate schools and looking for jobs. She seldom sees Magnolia or *Mei* during a whole week even though they live in the same apartment. She wonders many times why her relationships with Magnolia and *Mei* are not as close as before, but finds it difficult to pinpoint the reason. She thinks that part of the reason might be related to their studying in different faculties and following different class

[17] A pseudonym.

schedules and thus makes it difficult to be at the apartment at the same time. And part of the reason is that they are busy all the time. Since they live in separate bedrooms they spend less and less time together if they do not make some extra efforts to meet and talk with one another. I wonder if their relationships with one another have changed because their shared physical living space has changed. The open and trusting relationship among them in that one-bedroom apartment seems to have been lost after they moved into separate bedrooms in this current apartment. Jasmine worries that she will be judged by Magnolia and *Mei* if she tells them everything on her mind. She keeps all her thoughts, feelings and problems to herself when she is with Magnolia and *Mei*. I remember Magnolia once sent me an email, asking me to help Jasmine in whatever way I can because she believes that Jasmine trusts me. I feel sad that the invisible wall Jasmine has built between herself and Magnolia and *Mei* has made it very difficult for her to feel safe and comfortable in this current apartment. It is not her home, but just a place for her to eat and to sleep. She goes to her boy friends for emotional support. Because she met them in Edmonton, she feels that she is free to be her self and that they accept who she is without judgment. She feels more comfortable and safer with them. And I wonder if she is more at home with them.

It is no wonder that Jasmine feels all those apartments in Edmonton are dormitories, not her homes. Home, for her, is the freedom to be no matter where she lives.

Can I return to China?

Journal Entry: February 20, 2003, Edmonton

In mid-January, I helped Magnolia and *Mei* with their personal statement for their graduate school application, but I did not hear anything from Jasmine. I wondered if she needed any help. So I sent her an email, asking about her application for graduate schools. Jasmine replied:

> Dear Lisa:
>
> Thank you for your care about my application for grad school. Right now, I have two choices after graduating from U of A. Primary choice, I want to find a permanent job (anywhere in Canada) and get immigrated. (However, this is not easy for me since I do not have any work experience.) After two years' working, I will go to graduate school (U of T) and update my knowledge. Second choice, I can go to graduate school (Electrical Engineering) directly, obtain a master's degree as quickly as possible, and get immigrated in Canada. With a master's degree and immigration status, I will find a job in Ontario. However, since my undergraduate study is not Electrical Engineering, I have to take third and fourth year undergraduate Electrical Engineering courses. If I apply for graduate study at U of A, I can take the least courses compared with other universities since my undergrad study is in Engineering at the U of A. I really want to go to Ontario, but it will take me longer time and more money (higher tuition and living fees) to get a master's degree there. Therefore, I decide to apply for the graduate school in U of A only. Two weeks ago, I sent a preliminary application to the U of A EE department. If they accept me, they will allow me to send the formal application. Right now, I am waiting for their reply, which will take four to six weeks.
>
> I also have applied for some summer jobs related to engineering. On Engineering Career Day (the week before last week), I asked two companies whether or not they would employ international students. They said that the chance for a permanent job was probably "no", but it seems "ok" for a summer job since international student could get one year working Visa after graduation.

> Approaching graduation, I feel a little bit losing my direction. I believe the future is bright, but there are too many uncertainties right now. I think the most important thing in the present is to do my best, be patient, and wait for the result.
>
> I will inform you immediately if my preliminary application is passed, and we can work together on the formal one.
>
> Thank you very much for all the help you give us and have a nice day!
>
> Jasmine
>
> (Jasmine, email messages, January 26, 2003)

I was greatly relieved to know that Jasmine already had a well-defined plan for her future. I was worried because she was so busy that she might lose her sense of direction. I was happy that I had been wrong! It seemed that she would rather find a job and immigrate to Canada first than start her graduate school right after her first university degree. I agreed with her that everything would work out in the end and that it was just the process of living with so many uncertainties that was challenging.

Last Friday, February 14, Jasmine sent me an email, telling me that her preliminary application for graduate study in EE has passed, that she could send in the formal application now and that she would bring the application form to our research conversation this afternoon. She did and we talked about it first. She looked exhausted. When I asked her how was everything else in her life, she told me:

> I feel empty in my heart. I don't know where my future will be. I become fretful recently. During the day I go to classes, and do projects. I don't return home until 8 or 9 o'clock in the evening. I go to the internet to look for jobs and graduate schools. My original plan is to find a job as soon as I graduate. After a year or two, I will study for my master's. However, it is not easy to find a job here. I have applied for many, but only received the same email reply: "Thank you very

much for your application. We will contact you if you are selected for an interview." As for my master's, I didn't hear anything from the Electrical Engineering department for almost a month. They didn't even send an email to tell me that they had received my application. I even doubted if my computer had an error so that my preliminary application was not sent out.

(Jasmine, research conversation, original in Chinese, February 20, 2003, p. 1)

Feeling empty inside, Jasmine is not sure where she should go next. She feels that her life is out of her control right now. There is a lot of stress, anxiety and worry in her life. She is busy all day with her course assignments and projects. At night, she is busy searching the internet for jobs and graduate schools. It is no wonder that Magnolia and *Mei* cannot see her around their apartment! Realizing that it is very difficult to find a job as an international student in Canada and to be admitted into a master's program in Electrical Engineering at the U of A, Jasmine is very worried about her future and wonders if she can return to China when these two doors – finding a job or going to a graduate school in Canada - are both closed to her. She told me,

I phoned my mother on Chinese New Year's Day, February 1, to say Happy New Year. Later that day, I phoned her again, this time not to send my greetings, but to ask her if I can return to China to work if I can't find a job or go to graduate school here. I want to work in China for a year or two and then return to Canada to do my master's degree. (Because with a bachelor's degree plus some work experience, I can apply for landed immigrant status and my work experience does not have to be in Canada.) I want to become an immigrant as soon as possible.

My mother misunderstood me and said, "If you no longer want to study, we certainly welcome you back." I reassured her that I would study for my master's degree eventually, but not now. She hesitated for a while and asked me to call her back in half an hour.

I called back and she said," I have discussed this with your Dad. If you want to continue with your studies, you had better not return to work here in China right away. Many high-tech joint-ventures require higher degrees. With your bachelor's degree, you can not participate in doing projects at all. You can only become a worker in a factory. Do you want to be a worker?"
"Of course not!" I answered.
"How about this, you study for your master's for a year and I will look for opportunities in those joint-ventures for you to gain some work experience. In this way, you will have work experience and you can apply for immigration. How does that sound?" My mother asked me. I felt the heavy stone in my heart finally dropped to the ground (a Chinese idiom, meaning I felt greatly relieved). I realized that I am not alone, that I am not without anything and that there is always one corner that I can depend on in this world.

(Jasmine, research conversation, original in Chinese, February 20, 2003, p. 1)

Feeling very anxious, Jasmine could not help phoning her mother twice on Chinese New Year's Day to discuss her future plans. What a sense of relief she must have felt the moment she realized that there is always one corner of the world that she can depend on no matter what happens, that she is not alone after all, and that she will always have the support from her parents when she needs it. Although Jasmine understands that her mother wants her to stay in Canada, to find a job or go to graduate school, she is comforted by the thought that she does have the third option of returning back to China if nothing else works out and that that door will always be open to her. Home, her parents, is there for her when she needs it. She said,

这个Christmas我回中国，和父母到处去travel，当时我就觉得挺温馨的，因为很久都没有和父母聚在一起，到处去旅游。我那时就觉得，只要和父母在一起，你到了什么地方都可以算是家了。在加上在South City的时候，我病了，我妈妈很照顾我，让我想起小时候我生病时妈妈在我身边照顾我的情形，我觉得挺温暖的。其实，现在想一想，每个人长大以后都要离开父母，

你不可能总是在父母身边，然后，我觉得家对我来说...我也弄不清楚。

English translation: I returned to China for a visit during this Christmas. I went traveling with my parents. At that time I felt the warmth and the fragrance of a home because I had not been with both my parents or traveled together with them for a very long time. At that time I felt as long as you are with your parents, wherever you are can be counted as your home. What's more, I became sick when we were in South City. My Mom took very good care of me, which reminded me of how she took care of me right at my bedside when I was sick as a young child. I felt the warmth. As a matter of fact, if I think about it now, everybody will leave their parents when they grow up. It is not possible for you to always stay with your parents. Then, I think home to me is... I have no idea.

(Jasmine, research conversation, original in Chinese, February 20, 2003, p. 1)

During her most recent trip back to China, Jasmine realized that as long as she is with her parents, wherever she is can be counted as her home. She felt the warmth and fragrance of home when she was travelling with both her parents, especially when she became sick and her mother took very good care of her. Her mother would wake up in the middle of the night, come to her bedside and touch her forehead to see if the fever had gone, Jasmine told me, just like when she was a young child. Jasmine seems to be yearning for the warmth, nurturance and caring of her home; on the other hand, she tells herself that she cannot stay with her parents forever because "everybody will leave their parents when they grow up". I wonder if this internal conflict within herself makes it very difficult for Jasmine to pinpoint what home is for her at the moment and in the future. I wonder if she has lived with this tension since she was in junior high school in China and if she will continue to live with it until she figures out what home is for her.

Right now, Jasmine prefers to stay in Canada. She is worried that she might have

to leave. She thinks she is not ready to go back to China yet. She still has a long way to go before she feels that she has learned enough theoretical knowledge and gained enough practical experience in the engineering field. She wants to become a well-informed professor and to teach in a Chinese university eventually. On several occasions, she also tells me about the main concern she has that might prevent her from returning to China in the future. During our last research conversation on January 15, 2003, we talked about her Christmas trip to China and she told me,

> When I first came to Canada, I did not miss China. Because I went to that boarding senior high school, I left my home and my parents. I learned to deal with things myself. On the one hand, it was a good opportunity for me to learn and to grow up; on the other hand, I think I had more freedom because my mother interfered with my life too much (laughing while saying this). Now I still think the same way. Although I might return to work as a university professor in China in the future, right now I don't want to go back. That's for sure. Even after I get my green card here, I want to study further or to find a job to increase my knowledge and ability from different aspects and/or fields. I will wait until the time when I feel sufficiently competent. Even if I am ready to return to China, I will assess the political system and situation first and then make the final decision to return or not. During this trip home, my mother also said, "If you return, if the political situation in China changes suddenly and the political campaigns are on the rise again and become the main focus of people's lives, there will be no need for you to return at all."
>
> (Jasmine, research conversation, original in Chinese, January 15, 2003, p. 1)

Jasmine did not miss China when she first came to Canada. To some extent, she said goodbye to her home psychologically when she left her home and her parents for that boarding high school at the age of 15. As she learned to deal with things on her own there, she became more mature and more independent. Coming to Canada seems to be

another opportunity for her to learn and to grow up and to be away from her mother's influence on her life. She really enjoys her freedom here. When she feels that she is ready to return, she will make her final decision based on her assessment of the political climate in China then. I know what Jasmine is talking about. I know what her mother was talking about. In fact, her mother's generation went through so many political upheavals in their lifetime that I cannot help wondering if that fear of political instability in China was one of the reasons that they sent their children abroad for studies in the first place. They thought that their children would have a better life and a better future in Canada.

Can Jasmine return to China one day? Will she want to return then? I wonder...

I want to stay here for a while

Journal Entry: June 10, 2003, Edmonton

I wonder why Jasmine has decided not to attend her convocation ceremony tomorrow. Is it because her parents cannot come here to celebrate this achievement with her due to the SARS alert in Canada? Is it because she is still so busy looking for jobs or graduate schools that she is not in a good mood to mark the occasion? Her formal application to study for her master's in the Electrical Engineering Department was rejected last month since her undergraduate studies were in Chemical Engineering. Now she is the only one whose near future is still not determined. Both Magnolia and *Mei* have been admitted into their master's programs at the University of Alberta.

I believe that Jasmine has good enough reasons to decide not to attend her

convocation ceremony, but I still want to give her a graduation gift as I did with Magnolia and *Mei*. In order to congratulate Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* on their graduation from the university, *Guoji* and I bought three photo albums, which *Yan-Yan* helped us pick, as this is a graduation gift from our family to each one of them. I copied three different poems onto three pieces of paper of different colours. I cut each into a heart-shape and asked *Yan-Yan* to glue it onto the first page inside each album. We then wrapped them up so that it would be a surprise! All my friends know that I love taking photos. To me, photos are memory holders that tell stories of ourselves, family, friends and events in different places and at different times in our lives. I hope that Jasmine will like this gift too.

As I am waiting for Jasmine to drop by my office to pick it up, I scan through the name lists of graduates in the Faculty of Business and Faculty of Engineering for *Spring Convocation 2003*. I find Magnolia and *Mei*'s Chinese name only. To my surprise, I see Jasmine's English name appeared as her middle name! How has that happened? I know she has not had a legal name change. The only logical explanation is that she put in her English name as her middle name on the initial application form when she first applied to study at the University of Alberta and it has been on official record ever since. I remember Jasmine has put her English name as her first name and her Chinese first name in brackets on her most recent resume. I wonder why she has made that switch from her Chinese first name to her English one. Is it because it is much easier for Canadian employers to say her English name? Is it because she is now more comfortable with her English identity in Canada than when she first came? Unlike *Mei*, who has changed her English name several times and is still not happy with her current one, Jasmine has had

no difficulty at all with her English name. She told me,

> My mother chose Lily[18] as my English name. She felt this name fits me. Of course, there was no scientific explanation for her choice. Our Chinese names usually have special meanings. Parents would consider how many strokes our first name should have in order to do us good for our future lives. I only had one Chinese character as my first name before grade three. In grade three I had a classmate whose name was exactly the same as mine. Since he was a boy he was called *nan* __ (male __) and I was called *nü* __ (female __). My mother thought that they had changed my family name in this way[19]. So she decided to add another Chinese character to my first name. This has been my Chinese name ever since. When I came to Canada, my mother told me that Lily would be my English name. She found this name for me. There might be similar thinking behind English names, but I did not know. I feel it is more natural to use my Chinese name in China and my English name in Canada.
>
> (Jasmine, research conversation transcript, original in Chinese, February 20, 2003, p. 1)

Jasmine thinks that it is very natural to use her English name in Canada and to use her Chinese name in China. Interestingly, however, Jasmine did not pick her English name Lily herself. Her mother chose it for her while she was still in China whereas both Magnolia and *Mei* picked their own English names after they came to Canada. Jasmine simply accepted her mother's naming decision and called herself Lily in English. She was used to following whatever her mother told her to do, she says. She also remembers when she was in grade three, it was again her mother who decided to add another Chinese character to her first name so that her name was not exactly the same as that of a boy in her class. Her mother's strong presence in her life is evidenced throughout the stories she has told me. I remember once she wrote,

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[18] A pseudonym.

[19] In a Chinese name, family name always comes first and is followed by given names.

> My mother is the most important person in my life. I would do whatever I can to impress her and make her feel proud of me. Because of the Grand Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), my mother always regrets that she did not have the chance to go to university although she was very smart and hardworking. Therefore, she has very high expectations of me and hopes that I can realize her dream.
>
> My family is not rich, but my mother is good at saving money. She has spent a lot of money on me and my education without the slightest hesitancy. She bought me a piano when I was only six years old. She found a tutor to teach me how to play the piano for ten years. She sent me to Canada to do my first university degree.
>
> The only thing I do not like about my mother is that she always does everything for me, which has made me lack the abilities to socialize with other people. Therefore, I was happy that I could go abroad and study and leave her for a while. I am a person who does not care what others think of me, but I do care what my mother's opinion is about me. In a sense, my mother controls my happiness and sadness.
>
> (Jasmine, email messages, November 21, 2002)

For Jasmine, her mother is the centre of her world, the most important person in her life. As a daughter, she wants to do anything that she can to make her mother feel proud of her. Through a family story that her mother told her, she knows about her mother's regrets of not going to university during the Cultural Revolution and hopes that she can realize her mother's dream. She appreciates her mother's sacrifice and investment in her education. She understands that her mother has very high expectations of her. She tries very hard to live up to them. Sometimes she succeeds; sometimes she fails. Over the years, her relationship with her mother fluctuates as her academic performance at school goes up and down. It seems that the quality of the relationship with her mother has determined whether Jasmine has a sense of home in those different apartments she has lived in China. In her memory, when she succeeded academically in elementary school,

she was a happy child at home even though her first home had some fishy smell all day long and most of the time she was locked up in her home to play the piano. When she failed to become a top student in junior high school, she felt that she had disappointed her mother, who was very rude to her whenever she got bad marks then. Jasmine felt that she was not a beautiful white swan any more, but an ugly duckling in her mother's eye. This tension-filled relationship made her second home an unbearable place to live in even though it was in a much nicer neighbourhood and with fresh mountain air. She was so happy and relieved when her mother decided to send her to a boarding high school. It was there that she began to understand her mother and realized that her mother really loves her. Their relationship had a positive turn. With her mother's weekend visits and constant encouragement, Jasmine worked really hard every day. Eventually her marks improved and she gained her confidence back. Jasmine did not care very much about the poor living conditions and strict rules in that boarding school. She was very happy that she had some freedom to deal with her own things without her mother's control there. Jasmine has been well aware of her mother's influence and control over her life. In fact, one of the two reasons that she came to Canada to study was to leave her mother "since she always controlled my life". Home, for Jasmine then and now, seems to be quite complex and conflicting. To some extent, her mother is her home; and yet she rejects this home from time to time because she needs the freedom to be and to become who she is on her own terms. Jasmine is homeless in China.

The other reason that Jasmine decided to come to Canada was that she wanted to "get a better opportunity to reach my goals in life". There were so many outstanding students in China that she did not think that she would be able to go to top universities or

get a good job after graduation there. Now that she has reached her first goal of obtaining a university degree in Canada, Jasmine is ready to move on to her next goal in life. She wants to stay in Canada longer because she likes it here, especially the people here. In her second journal entry, she wrote in English:

> After graduation, I want to stay in Canada either to find employment or go to graduate school. There are two reasons for me to make this decision. One is that I want to immigrate to Canada. Another more important reason is that I find the people here are nice and simple. They are nice because most of the people (professors and classmates) are willing to help you. They are simple because they give their true opinion. I took a fourth year presentation course this term. We are required to give one minute, three minutes and seven minutes talks in front of an audience. Our professor and three critics chosen from the classmates will evaluate your seven-minute presentation. One of the evaluation criteria is pronunciation and clarity (P & C). (Actually, I feel pressure when doing my presentation since all the classmates, except two students from Germany and me, are native speakers of English.) One critic from Germany gives me 10/10 for P & C. The second critic, a Canadian, gives me 9/10. The third one, another Canadian, gives me 5/10. And the professor gives me 6 out of 10. At first, I am very upset about the marks, especially the one from the professor. However, if that is what Canadians evaluate my pronunciation, I have to work harder and improve it. In contrast, if they all give me good marks, I may not be aware of my pronunciation problem. No finding, no improvement, right?
>
> (Jasmine, research journal entry, November 14, 2002)

Spending most of her time on campus, Jasmine's main social relationships outside her apartment are with her professors and classmates. She finds them nice and simple. They are willing to help her and they give her their true opinions. Initially upset about the low mark her professor gave her on her pronunciation and clarity for her presentation, Jasmine later persuades herself to accept the Canadian standard and to work harder in

order to improve her pronunciation. I can only imagine the heavy blow this low mark has caused to Jasmine's self image as a competent English language learner. I feel saddened by the fact that after five years of studying in English in Canada, Jasmine's spoken English is still considered by some native English speakers as "not good enough". I decided to write a response to her:

> Did you get a chance to talk to those critics and ask why they gave you those marks?
> The issue of "perfect native-like pronunciation" has been on my mind for quite a while. As English becomes an international language, there will be more and more people speaking English with an accent. Of course, we should try to speak better and more correct English, but I have come to believe that as long as your audience can understand you, you can speak it with an accent because that's part of your identity, part of who you are and where you come from.
>
> (Lisa, Response to Jasmine' journal entry of November 14, 2002)

Although Jasmine agreed to my comment, she cannot overcome her sense of inferiority as a non-native English speaker. She still wants to practice harder for "the native-like pronunciation". In her response to *Keun-ho*'s article *The Experience of Studying in a Foreign Language*, Jasmine wrote in her journal:

> Before my fourth year at the U of A, I do not have this sense of inferiority very strongly because I always do my homework with several of my Asian friends, who speak either Mandarin or Cantonese. I do not speak with local Canadian students. I do not want to see their surprised or even scornful facial expressions when I cannot speak fluent and perfect English. What's more, my brain is often filled with so many ideas that there is no space left for me to figure out how to express them properly in English. To make matters worse, I speak worse English in front of native speakers of English than I normally do. One of my friends is from Malaysia. Although his English is not that great, he does not mind. He likes communicating with people and he has many friends. Another friend is from Vietnam. She came here when she was 11 or 12 years old. She can be counted as half Canadian. In my fourth year, there are many presentations and group work. I have to break

> the barrier and to communicate with people. I find myself often speak English like a fool. Of course I also experience the pitiful or sneering stare from others. In fact, it is not just me. Sometimes even a professor is laughed at or made fun of in public. In my second year, we had several classes of students doing the same final math exam. When a Chinese professor stood in front of the class and tried to make some corrections on the exam paper, four or five Canadian students complained loudly that they could not understand him. Perhaps they were this professor's students and he was quite strict with them in his class. They probably did not get along. In the end, a Canadian professor went to the front and made the corrections. At that moment, I decided that I wanted to speak perfect native-like English one day. I would not give others the chance to laugh at me.
>
> (Jasmine, research journal entry, January 25, 2003)

Feeling insecure and anxious about her English proficiency, Jasmine avoided her Canadian peers and limited her direct contact with several of her Asian friends for the first three years of her university studies. During her fourth year, she is forced to leave her comfort zone and interact with her Canadian peers because of many presentations and group work. However, she often finds herself "speaking like a fool" during those interactions because she can think far more and faster than she can express her ideas in English. Having witnessed what she sensed was a Chinese math professor being humiliated by his Canadian students, Jasmine was determined to perfect her English pronunciation so that she would not be laughed at in the future. Jill Bell (1997) wrote,

> A large part of how we see ourselves is in the reflections of the ways others see us, so our ability to express ourselves to others, to use language and literacy, is perhaps particularly relevant to our sense of self (p. 200).

Jasmine is worried that she will be judged solely on her language and on being not good enough as an English speaker. She has a feeling that if she comes to speak English better, she is going to belong and feel more at home in Canada. I wonder how much

longer it will take Jasmine to reach that native-like English pronunciation. Will it be necessary? Will she ever feel comfortable and confident enough to speak English with an accent in Canada? And how long will that take her?

While Jasmine's lack of confidence in speaking English with her Canadian peers has continued over the past four years, her discomfort of interacting with her Canadian professors has diminished as time goes by. In the second term during her second year, she wrote to me:

> From the bottom of my heart, I prefer the professors whose first languages are not English. As my first language is not English, either, I feel those professors treat me with respect and they can understand my difficulties in English. I like them very much and when I see them I feel very warm. I always ask them questions and do well in their courses. I cannot say that Canadian professors are bad, but I didn't feel very comfortable to go to their classes. I know this is not good. Since I am in Canada, I need to fit in the Canadian society. I should not always consider myself as a foreigner, a Chinese. This term, I have many Canadian Professors and I think I will do well on these courses and try to get along with the professors.

Jasmine prefers those professors whose first languages are not English. She feels that they are more respectful and more understanding of her as a non-native English speaker. She is comfortable and confident in speaking English with them. She asks them questions and does well in their courses. Noticing her own preferences, Jasmine makes a conscious effort to deal with her discomfort with her Canadian professors. She tells herself that she is now in Canada and that she needs to fit in the Canadian society. She should not always see herself as a foreigner, a Chinese. She should follow the Canadian ways of doing things around the university, going to her professors and asking them questions if she needs any help. So she does. Now she no longer feels uncomfortable

going to her Canadian professors' classes. I wonder why she feels differently towards her Canadian professors from her Canadian peers. Is it because the professors are more willing and more patient in trying to listen and to understand her than her peers since she pays the tuition? Without the comfort of living in a language being spoken around her and of being accepted as who she is, how can Jasmine ever feel at home in Canada?

After living in Edmonton for almost five years, Jasmine realizes that she has changed. She does not think that she is a mature person yet, but she believes that she is more mature than many of the persons at her age. She thinks that she is sensitive. She likes to observe what is happening to her and learn from them. She says that she has learned a lot since she came to Canada because so many things have happened in her life. She thinks that she is becoming more and more independent. She used to depend on her mother a lot since she always did everything for her. She is very happy to have the opportunity to do what she wants after she comes overseas. Although Jasmine likes these aspects of change within herself, she feels puzzled over others. She wonders whether her mind will become simpler if she stays in Canada longer:

> Last summer when I visited China, I went to *Hangzhou* with my father and my cousin for a tour. I saw a couple of beggars around 60 years old asking some tourists for money. They seemed able-bodied and healthy. One of them walked toward me and I did not have any money on me. My cousin ignored him and walked away. I was embarrassed and I called out, "Dad!" My father glanced at the man and gave him some (I did not know the sum) out of his wallet. Instantly more beggars circled around us. My father was annoyed and he said in a stern voice, "With hands and feet, you choose to earn money not from doing physical labour but to earn a living in this way. It is a real shame!" All the beggars walked away after his words. My father was right. We should not have given them the money. Why could he hold his ground firmly and refuse them while I could only stand there, feeling like a fool? I felt ashamed of myself.

Have I become a fool?

(Jasmine, research journal entry, original in Chinese, November 16, 2002)

Being away from China for three years, Jasmine was shocked to realize that she no longer knew how to do things properly the Chinese way. She felt like a fool not knowing how to respond appropriately when some beggars asked her for money at a tourist site during her first trip back to China. She found out that she could not just ignore the beggar and walk away as her cousin did. Nor could she act like her father. Feeling ashamed that she could not even handle such a trivial thing with confidence, she questioned herself if she had become "a fool" after living in Canada for three years. She wondered whether she could return to China and fit back into a changed and still changing world if she stayed in Canada longer and changed more within herself.

Right now Jasmine seems to be in a liminal space (Heilbrun, 1999, p. 90), a kind of space on the threshold filled with anxiety and uncertainty because she has no idea where her home is, what she is going to do next, and where her place is in either China or Canada. She is worried that she might be a fool if she tries to go back to China because she might not belong there. She wonders if she might belong in Canada because her application for graduate school has just been rejected. Hovering on the threshold, Jasmine will probably remain homeless for a while until she figures out where her home is, what home is for her and who she wants to be.

I hear a knock on my office door. It is Jasmine with a big backpack and it is not even 11 o'clock yet! She always arrives early for our meetings. I give her the graduation gift and she puts it into her backpack without opening it in front of me, which is a very Chinese way of giving and taking gifts. Jasmine says that she has been busy studying

French since the end of April because she wants to gain some extra language points for her immigration application. She also says that she will move to a friend's house at the end of this month when Magnolia and *Mei,* who have been admitted into their master's programs at the U of A, move to Newton Place, an on-campus residence for single students. They will share a two-bedroom apartment with another friend. Jasmine might be leaving Alberta at the end of August. She is applying for other programs in other Canadian universities while still looking for job opportunities.

I take Jasmine downstairs to the Coutts Education library and sign out some French learning resources on my library card for her to study. As I say goodbye to her and watch her leaving, I sincerely hope that she can stay in Canada for a longer while and realize all her dreams.

As I sit at the Coronado Beach on Coronado Island, San Diego, California, watching white waves upon waves rush to the shore and the deep blue Pacific Ocean in the background, I wonder if any of the Chinook salmon from the Fraser River will ever reach this part of the Pacific Ocean. If some do, will they prefer the warm Californian sunshine so much that they want to stay here for the rest of their lives? Will they want to be buried here when they die? Is this home-making in the ocean less a struggle for them than their home-coming journey upstream in the river? Or is there always the struggle no matter where their home is...

(Lisa, Journal entry, September 2, 2005)

Chapter Seven

Where is Home?

I still feel homeless here!

Journal Entry: August 22, 2005, Edmonton

Loss of sleep. Loss of appetite. No energy left to do anything. Feeling sad for no obvious reason. Four L-O-N-G days of gray sky and rain last week and several more to come this week. No sun or blue sky in August in Edmonton?! A gloomy picture indeed.

I did not realize how exhausted I had been until my body yelled at me, "YOU NEED A BREAK OR YOU WILL BREAK!" I somehow strained my muscles in the right leg during my daily morning run on August 6 and I had to stop. Last Tuesday when I tried to resume my yoga practice, my lower back hurt so much that I came to realize that my bones might be getting old at a faster speed than I would have liked them to. Last Friday my neck became stiff. All the while I forced myself to sit in front of the computer, trying to write this last chapter with a muddled head… In vain... I did not write one single word as the weeks flew by…

I can see the mountain top so clearly now because it is only several steps away… But I have no energy left inside me… In tears, I just stand there and watch with a strained leg, an aching back, a stiff neck and a broken heart…

I wonder why I feel depressed at the thought of writing this last chapter. I have all my three big ideas planned out: home as place, home as relationship and home as life. I even know which one of my stories should go to which piece and in what order. But my attempt to construct the first journal entry dated December 15, 2003 does not lead me to where I want it to go. I get stuck.

The weekly Research Issues Conversations at the CRTED is taking an August break. This place, my academic home place, feels so quiet with only Cherie Geering and me. Yi-Fu Tuan (1991) wrote,

> Homes are "cold" without people, and come alive with them… [I]t is the human presence, human feelings, and human communication that add to the warmth and aliveness of a place… or drain the place of warmth and meaning… [T]he quality of human communication, including (pre-eminently) the kinds of words and the tone of voice used, seems to infect the material environment, as though a light – tender, bright, or sinister – has been cast over it (p. 690).

I realize now how much I miss the people around the table, who have helped me to think and talk through my writing ideas by asking me questions and/or giving me suggestions. I miss their research and/or life stories too. They have become such an integral part of my doctoral journey as I am aiming for the finish line. I know in my heart that they will cheer me on. And I will continue...

I remember a year ago today, I wrote a poem for my friend Leslie Crawford, who was also contemplating about where her home would be at that time. She was thinking about leaving Japan, where she had been working for five years, but she was not sure where she wanted to go next either. We just finished working on the Korean Teacher

Education Project and decided to meet at Second Cup to catch up with our lives the day before. When I saw her in front of the Education Building she was waiting for her friend to pick up a blow-up copy of a photograph she had taken in *Hangzhou*, a city near my hometown Shanghai, during her trip to China in May last year. That image of a path in a foggy forest stuck in my head. I knew it would not go away until I did something about it. So I wrote the following poem.

A Path in a Foggy Forest
-- To my friend Leslie Crawford
by Yi Li, August 22, 2004

Where is your destination?
I ask you
This is my destination
You show me a picture

What do you see?
You ask me
a certain path that leads to somewhere
I answer

My friend burst into tears
when she saw the picture
you tell me
I don't know where I am going

I didn't know where I was going, either
I tell you
not until two years ago
I was in this picture, too

Canada --
a strange place
I couldn't see my road ahead
but look back to a path behind

It has taken me --
six LONG years
and three DARK episodes of depression
to see where I want to go

Even though it is still foggy
far ahead
I have come to believe
I will walk my own path, step by step

I decide to put down my roots
for my own sanity and health
I am tired
hovering above the Pacific Ocean in between

I need to touch down
and face my reality
I need to find a home
for my wondering/wandering heart

Where is my destination?
I ask myself
That same final resting place for everyone
How I CHOOSE to walk my path will make all the difference

A year has gone by and I find myself still in the midst of a foggy forest, not sure where I want to go next... or rather, I know where I don't want to go... "This place hurts my spirit!" I can't remember where I read this sentence, but it jumps out to me as I think about the possibility and prospect of staying inside the ivory tower for the rest of my life. The tensions that have been building up within and without myself since my graduate school started in 1998 are too heightened to be pushed aside any more. Where is my place in Canada? Who am I in my research and teaching? Why do I want to work in a university, where the dominant narrative is competitive and individual, which goes against everything that I believe in how to work in a place and how to live a life? Am I going to be who the university wants me to be or am I going to be who I want to be?

While I am pondering about the direction of my future professional life, I am also experiencing some unavoidable tensions accumulated over the past seven years of graduate school in my personal life. Although I have been happier since *Yan-Yan* came

to Edmonton and joined me in May 2000, I feel torn between wanting *Guoji* to stay with us in Edmonton and encouraging him to do what he loves in Jasper, where he has lived and worked since the summer of 1990. I often wonder if *Guoji* feels more at home in Jasper than in Edmonton and what home means to him and to those Chinese young men who came with Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* to study in Canada several years ago.

Guoji has friends and a job he loves in Jasper. He is happy and comfortable there because he knows his place there. It has been painful for me to witness his struggle between his obligation as a husband and a father in Edmonton and his freedom to do what he wants in Jasper. I did not want to force him to make a choice, so I waited. After traveling back and forth for more than a year, he decided to give up Jasper and to stay in Edmonton with *Yan-Yan* and me in the fall of 2001. What should he do then? As it was fairly easy to find a job in the computer industry at that time, he chose to upgrade himself in order to become a computer technician. However, he was angry and frustrated during the whole process, from the initial application to the whole learning experience. Although he survived the 10-month certification program in 2002, he did not like the idea of spending the rest of his life fixing computers. He returned to Jasper in the spring of 2003 only to find that the place he had worked for more than 12 years would be sold at the end of July. Not willing to work anywhere else in Jasper, he came back to Edmonton with a big empty space in his life. Two jobless people under one roof, not a very good combination. As the tensions built up, I found myself often napping in the student lounges on campus instead of going back to our apartment to take a rest. I did not have any energy left to write my dissertation. I needed to find a job first so that we could settle down. I could no longer put *Guoji* up in the air for too long.

Maybe doing a Ph. D. is a luxury that new immigrants cannot afford. But I have gone too far to give it all up now. I have to continue. I will continue.

I can't remember how many times I have had this internal dialogue with myself for the past two years. As I look back at my own life, I see all the resonances with Magnolia, *Mei* and Jasmine's stories: home as place, home as relationship and home as life. Only this time I feel it differently because I am living it... and it is difficult for me to think/write about home when I myself live in the midst of being/feeling homeless...

It is no wonder that my writing has come to a stop...

What is home?

Journal Entry: September 19, 2005, Edmonton

Thanks to my sister's insistence that *Yan-Yan* and I should go and visit her in California, we left the rainy and cold Edmonton for the dry and hot San Diego on August 27. We stayed there for a week and I only brought a CD with my dissertation draft on it just in case. I did not open the CD, not even once. I was busy watching Shamu Shows in the Sea World and screaming on roller-coasters at the top of my lung in Disneyland with *Yan-Yan*. In between, my sister took care of *Yan-Yan* so that I could have some free time on my own. I took long walks around a lagoon near where she lives. She also drove us to the beaches every other day. I could just sit and watch the Pacific Ocean while she and *Yan-Yan* picked and washed the seashells together. Towards the end of that week, I felt relaxed and happy again. My neck and shoulders were less stiff and my lower back pain was not as bad as when it first started. I knew that these physical ailments were

probably related to the overwhelmingly high stress level I was experiencing, trying to write this last chapter and sorting my life out at the same time.

I am so happy that Research Issues Conversations started again two weeks ago. While I was sharing with the people around the table how I got stuck with my writing of the first piece in this chapter, I came to realize that I needed to fast forward my journal entry dated December 15, 2003 to the present because I did not know then what I know now and it made no sense to write from that point in time any more. I wonder why I decided on that particular date in the first place.

As I re-read the previous three chapters and think about the many stories Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* have told me, I look back and start to see my own life again. I can see all these three threads in my life, in my story around home, as I can in theirs: home as place, home as relationship, and home as life. There are such remarkable parallels in our stories.

Home as place

One of the three ways of thinking about home that comes out of Jasmine, Magnolia, and *Mei*'s stories is home as place. The thread of place is most clearly manifested in Magnolia's stories of home. Since neither of her parents are natives of Foggy City, Magnolia grew up, traveling back and forth between Foggy City, her hometown, and Big City, her father's hometown or Green City, her mother's hometown. For Magnolia, her own home and both her maternal and paternal grandparents' homes are all her homes because these are significant places in her life. They are filled with stories and memories of her, her parents and her grandparents.

She remembers her birthplace, Green City, and that small added-on room on the balcony, where she spent the first month of her life there with her mother. During her subsequent visits in later years, she always stayed in that room in the summer time. Although this room was attached to her grandparents' home which was "old and dark" in reality, Magnolia now has "an intimate feeling about it" and thinks that it was "the most comfortable place in the world". She felt emotionally attached to this place. She was very sad when that room was torn down because she lost a meaningful home place in her life.

Magnolia thinks that she has another home in her father's hometown, Big City, where she spent every Chinese New Year in the winter. She has so many happy memories of that place. She played with the neighbourhood children, stealing wood from a nearby torn-down building, playing fireworks in the hallway and visiting one another during the holidays. She remembers the balcony where she raised some chickens, the market she went shopping with her grandmother and the different stores she visited every night in the area. It was also a place filled with her father's stories of growing up. However, when her grandparents moved to their current home, that old building was torn down. During her first visit back in China in 2000, she also went to Big City to see her grandparents. She missed that old place so much that she took a detour and stopped by the old neighbourhood one more time.

As Yi-fu Tuan (1974) wrote, "...a person in the process of time invests bits of his emotional life in his home, and beyond the home in his neighbourhood" (p. 99), Magnolia's happiest memories are associated with her own home in Foggy City, where she grew up in a self-contained small world, the courtyard. She told me once that every

time when she thinks about the courtyard, the following image will come into her mind: at every sunset, a group of young children playing happily, chasing and laughing all the way to their hearts' content. This neighbourhood used to be a safe and beautiful place with "trees, flowers, grass, water, buildings and stones". "There was no stranger, no traffic, no dangerous building. People knew one another very well". Magnolia loved this place and she resented the dramatic changes that occurred during her absence. The courtyard is no longer a safe place. Now there is an iron door outside each apartment. The lake, her favourite summer place, was filled up to make room for a parking lot as more and more people own cars nowadays, Magnolia told me. I could hear the sadness in her voice. She lost another significant home place in her life.

For Magnolia, homes are those "'old' homes which are filled with my and my parents' stories, not the bigger and more spacious new homes." These stories and memories give meaning and significance to the special places in her life. Even when the physical places are gone, she can visit and revisit them in her memory and in her imagination whenever she wants to. For her, home is not only a material or physical place. Home is more of a spiritual and emotional place. She believes that "home is a feeling, an emotion". When she has a feeling for a place, she will consider it to be her home.

Home as place is also woven through *Mei*'s stories. In her case, her home is in Foggy City, where her parents live and where she grew up. She remembers all these special places in her life: the balcony where she cried a lot as a young girl, the neighbourhood playground where she and her friends received gifts from foreign tourists and the frequent moves inside her home because of relatives coming and going.

However, she was surprised to notice that she did not feel as comfortable in her parents' new house as in their old home during her first return trip to China in 2000. She felt that she was a visitor rather than a person who really lived there. She only stayed there for a few weeks before coming back to Canada. She needed more time to get used to this new house, *Mei* told me. "Knowing a place," wrote Yi-Fu Tuan (1977),

> takes time. It is a subconscious kind of knowing. In time we become familiar with a place, which means that we can take more and more of it for granted. In time a new house ceases to make little demands on our attention; it is as comfortable and unobtrusive as an old pair of slippers (p. 184).

It will take time for *Mei* to know her parents' new house and to feel at home again in it.

As Edward Relph (1976) wrote, "[a] deep human need exists for associations with significant places" (p. 147), Jasmine's happiest memories are associated with her first home, the only home place in her young life in China. She was born and grew up in Foggy City, where all her four grandparents live. She still remembers clearly the piano she practiced playing everyday, the strong fishy smell from a nearby factory and the inconvenience of having an outside toilet. She remembers the weekend visits to her paternal grandparents' home and the time she spent there playing with her cousins. As a young child, Jasmine was often locked up in this home because the neighbourhood was too dangerous for her to play outside alone or with her friends. It was near a railway station and a seaport. There were a lot of strangers passing through every day. Jasmine stayed at home, reading as many children's books as she wanted and watching cartoons on TV. She was very happy then, she told me. She "got along very well with people" and "was popular at school". She was "a star" among her classmates and "a beautiful white swan" in her mother's eye. She had a place and she knew her place. Things had a downward turn when Jasmine started her junior high school. She lost this home place

and has been "homeless" in this way ever since.

Home as relationship

Another way of thinking about home that comes out of Jasmine, Magnolia, and *Mei*'s stories is home as relationships. This deep thread of relationships with people is most clearly seen in *Mei* and Jasmine's stories of home. *Mei* used to think of home as blood relationship. Since both her parents live in Foggy City, her home is there. For her, "[h]ome is when you need help or when you encounter difficulties and need someone to talk to… I feel parents can give you more support." As a self-described stubborn and mischievous little girl, *Mei* was often disciplined by her parents. Over the years, however, their relationship evolved to become more of a friend-to-friend relationship than of a parent-to-child one in a more traditional sense. She felt that her parents seldom pushed her to do something that she did not want to. When her father knew of an opportunity for her to come to Canada to study, he asked her to think about it and then decide, *Mei* told me. She chose to come herself. *Mei* was very close to her mother. She felt free to share everything on her mind with her mother, who talked to her as if she were her friend. For *Mei*, "[t]he time when I am with my parents is the happiest, warmest and most comfortable. When I am with them I feel that I am home." And a place becomes a home when "there is one who cares about you and loves you". While in Canada, *Mei* kept regular contact with her parents through long-distance telephone calls and with her friends in China via MSN chat rooms. Her positive relationships with her parents and her friends made her feel that her heart and soul are still in China "even though it is a dirty and chaotic place" in reality. Now *Mei*'s definition of home is broadening. She considers

home as a relationship with this wonderful young man she is yet to meet to start a new home for herself.

The thread of home as relationship is woven through Jasmine's stories in a different way. Although the physical location of her first home was less than ideal and she had to be locked up for safety reasons, Jasmine was happy in this home place largely due to her very positive relationships with other people both inside and outside her home. She remembers going to Sunday movies with her father, who "always bought me ice-cream". She remembers the daily bike-riding experience with her father to and from her school and those weekend visits to her grandparents', where she played with her cousins. "There were a lot of good memories between me and my family. I got along very well with people and I was popular at school." She was always one of the top three students in her class and all her teachers liked her. Jasmine was confident and content with herself then. She had a place and she knew her place both at home and in school.

However, things had an unexpected turn when Jasmine started junior high school, "which was the best in the city." By that time, she had already moved into her second home. Although this home was bigger and in a much nicer neighbourhood with fresh mountain air, Jasmine was not happy there. Among a class full of academically strong students, she was no longer "a star". She had very few friends at school. Her grades dropped dramatically, so did her self-confidence. "I did not know how to talk to people and nobody (teachers and students) noticed me". The school was not a safe place for her. She once saw "a very bad male student hit a female student leader on the face" and she was "scared to death." She did not like to go to school and it was "a nightmare" to her. While she felt invisible and fearful in school, she was very anxious at home. At that

time, "I did not like my mother very much since she was very rude to me whenever I got bad marks on my exams." How she wished that her father had been home so that he could have signed those exam papers! But he had already moved to South City. Sometimes Jasmine waited until the following morning and asked her mother to sign so that "she would not have much time to scold me" before going to work. The tensions Jasmine experienced with her classmates and teachers at school and with her mother at home made this second home almost unlivable. She could not wait to leave this home and this school.

Jasmine was greatly relieved when her mother decided to send her to a boarding school in the countryside. Although the living conditions were very poor and school rules were very strict, Jasmine really appreciated her time there. She was able to sort out things and feelings on her own. She started to understand her mother and realized that her mother really cared for her and loved her. For Jasmine, to a larger extent, her mother is her home because "[m]y mother is the most important person in my life. I would do whatever I can to impress her and make her feel proud of me". Depending on the quality of her relationship with her mother, Jasmine either had a home (till the end of elementary school) or did not have a home (since junior high school).

I was puzzled by her rejection of home during the early days of this research journey. I wondered why she thought that her friends could replace her need for a home. I wondered why she yearned for freedom and independence so much so that she was not homesick during the first two years in Canada. She started to feel a bit homesick only when Magnolia and *Mei* had left for China in the summer of 2000, Jasmine told me. She missed her parents and relatives then. One year later, she returned to China for a visit. In

December 2002, Jasmine went back again, traveling with her parents in the southern part of China this time. During the trip, she became sick and relived the experience of being taken care of by her mother as a young child. At that time, Jasmine realized that "as long as you are with your parents, wherever you are can be counted as your home". Jasmine's ambivalence toward her home reminds me of Yi-fu Tuan (1996), who wrote, "[h]earth, though nurturing, can be too confining; cosmos, though liberating, can be bewildering and threatening.... [M]any human beings may well feel a certain ambivalence toward both ends of the geographic scale" (p. 2). Using Tuan's words, I might say that Jasmine enjoys her freedom in the cosmos (Canada), but from time to time, she also needs to "return to the hearth (her parents) for nurturance and renewal" (Tuan, 1996, p. 2).

Jasmine gained another insight of home as relationship with people when she was reading and responding to my chronicled reconstruction of her life stories. She sent me the following via email on March 20, 2004:

> After I came here, I often think of the things I did before in Edmonton. When the happiness was around me, I seldom noticed it. When I stayed with my friends, I never thought that I would leave them some day. Therefore, sometimes I was away from them because I was busy or because of the bad mood or because of the little conflicts between us. However, after I left them and came to Winnipeg, I realized how much I missed them and how stupid I was not to share my every moment with them as much as I could. Those days will never come back again. When I was thinking back, I was very thankful to have them (Magnolia, *Mei*, and my other friends) in my past five years in Edmonton. They enriched my life with happiness, sadness, laughs, and tears. It was they who gave me all those memories. Actually, Lisa, I just realized, the feeling of home is also a feeling of people (friends and the one close to you). The warm feeling of home also comes from the good feeling of staying with friends and family. The furniture does not matter, the location does not matter, the food does not matter, the people to live

with do matter.

(Jasmine, e-mail messages, March 20, 2004)

Jasmine came to realize that "the warm feeling of home is also a feeling of people" and that it "comes from the good feeling of staying with friends and family". Right now, she is yearning for a new relationship, her boyfriend. She needs to find somebody who she can trust and mentally depend on, she told me. When she finds him, she will have a home, she said.

In Magnolia's stories, the thread of home as relationship is also evident throughout, but it shifted from the background to the foreground after she moved from China to Canada. When she lived in China, all her relationships were there, so they stayed in the background while home as place moved to the foreground in her stories around home. When she lives in Canada, home as relationship moves to the foreground while home as place stays in the background.

Earlier on our research journey, Magnolia thinks that home is "when I am with my father and mother". She believes that her home is in China "because all my family members and relatives are in China". In a letter to her paternal grandfather, Magnolia told him that "during my years of studying in Canada, I realize how important it is to have a peaceful home." For Magnolia, everything prospers and everyone flourishes in a peaceful home. Knowing that in her stories all her extended family members live their lives in harmonious relationships in China, Magnolia always wants to return to such a home, where she knows that she belongs and "where people care deeply for one another". Because of this web of relationships that are her home, Magnolia feels responsible to make careful decisions about her future life. She knows that her life choices are

interconnected with her parents and her cousin who might decide to come to study in Canada.

While struggling to figure out where to go next, Magnolia had some direct contact with many local Canadians during the Christmas holidays. She had some "real and meaningful" conversations with Michael. She stayed with a Canadian family living on a farm on Christmas Day and came to know their different way of life. She also met some of her Canadian classmates whom she did not have regular contact with. Robert Hay (1992) wrote, "even the most limited relationships aid in the development of being-in-place, and thus the feeling of belonging and security" (p. 100). As her relationships with Canadians expand and develop, Magnolia realizes that "the quality of life here is very good too. I like it here as well. Now I don't know if I can stay here to make a home myself'. For Magnolia, Edmonton/Canada feels like a more possible home place now.

Home as life

The third way of thinking about home that comes out of Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei*'s stories is home as life. Home is so much intertwined with their life experiences that each of them has lived out their own definitions of home differently. For Magnolia, "When I have a feeling for a place, I will consider it to be my home"; for *Mei*, home is where her heart and soul is; and for Jasmine, home is where she can be and become who she is. Home is not the neat place, I have come to realize. It is full of the complexities and messiness of human life, which is unfolding and always changing. It is a life construction that each one of us will live out in our own ways moment by moment, day by day. This sense of composing a life as we go along (Bateson, 1989) has become

stronger and stronger since we left our homes in China and came to Canada seven years ago. When we lived in China, we all knew where we were going, or so we thought. Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* would finish their university degree, find a job here in Canada, get married, have a family and life goes on. I would finish my master's degree, find a job here in Alberta, bring *Yan-Yan* over and settle down as a new immigrant should. To a larger extent, we had scripts to follow and structures to rely on in order to live our lives as a woman in China. Carolyn Heilbrun (1999) wrote,

> In my view, the reason why these old structures so appeal to some people is precisely that they can, in following them, avoid liminality, avoid hovering on the threshold, avoid having to take brave decisions and then having to live with the anxiety and uncertainty those decisions inevitably produce. It is easier to do what is expected of you than to live in "intensity and suspense" (p. 90).

When we chose to come to Canada, voluntary or not (*Mei* made the choice herself while Magnolia and Jasmine's parents sent them here and *Guoji* applied for my immigration.), we did not know what we were choosing. We thought we could continue to live by the old and familiar stories of how to be a good daughter, a good student, a good wife, a good mother and a good human being. We never imagined that we had to change "not only the self, but the story of self" (Bell, p. 221) in order to live in a strangely new world filled with "anxiety and uncertainty" and "intensity and suspense". We did not always know where we were going. It was so clear in Jasmine's stories. When she finished her first university degree, she did not know what was next. She was not sure who she was, where she was going and what it was that she wanted for her life. It was so difficult for her to live in that liminal space (Heilbrun, 1999).

There is an exhaustion about living in that liminal space in Magnolia's stories. On several occasions in her stories, Magnolia mentioned how exhausted she was living

and studying in Canada on her own and trying to figure out where to go next. She did not know. She, as well as Jasmine and *Mei*, was at the forefront of making a new world, a world where the old familiar stories failed them and the new stories were yet to emerge. They had no idea what was ahead in this storyless space. They were on the threshold. Heilbrun (1999) also wrote,

> The threshold was never designed for permanent occupation, however, and those of us who occupy thresholds, hover in doorways, and knock upon doors, know that we are in between destinies. But this is where we choose to be, and must be, at this time, among the alternatives that present themselves (p. 101 – 102).

As we can't live on the threshold space forever, we struggle to construct that new story, which will allow us to know where we are going. It is exhausting to figure out something that we can't really know in the context of our ongoing lives. Not only is the path uncertain, but also the construction of the stories about home is uncertain. They both might change as our lives unfold.

In a rapidly changing world, more unpredictable than ever before, what we need is probably "a readiness to learn, to enter a new and strange relationship and move quickly to the certainty, This is where I belong, for this I was created" (Bateson, 1994, p. 200) instead of hovering above as an outsider looking in and wondering if we will ever belong.

As I think more about Jasmine, Magnolia, and *Mei*, who were at the forefront of this whole younger group of international students who are coming now, I realize how difficult it was/has been for them to be at the front edge and to live in the midst of such uncertainty because there are no trodden paths or signposts to lead them the way. There are no available stories for them to live by. They have to make up their lives as they go along. And they are making them up so differently.

Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei* all indicated that this research journey has made a difference in their young lives. After they each finished reading their individual chapter, Jasmine and Magnolia chose to write me a letter and *Mei* wanted to talk with me about what they had learned on this research journey. On June 6, 2005, Magnolia wrote me the following letter in Chinese and I translated it into English paragraph by paragraph:

Lisa,

读完了关于自己的故事之后，我最想对你说的就是"谢谢！"谢谢你用心聆听一个人的诉说，谢谢你用心记录一个人的成长，谢谢你用心观察一个人的蜕变。在于我，是断断没有智慧和勇气去发现自己，拷问自己，记录自己的。你的写作让我有了回忆自己的机会，让我有了明白自己的时间。

After reading about my own stories, what I want to tell you the most is "THANK YOU". Thank you for listening to my stories with your heart. Thank you for recording my development and growth with your heart. Thank you for observing my metamorphoses with your heart. As for me, I won't have the wisdom and courage to discover myself, to probe myself, and to write myself. Your writing has given me the opportunity to remember myself and the time to understand myself.

今天再回头看看过去，读读过去，似乎很多东西都已经淡忘了。或许是因为它们不重要；但正是这些不重要的东西曾经给我的生活快乐和烦恼。谢谢你的记载，让我在点点滴滴中又看到了自己。

Looking back, reading back, it seems that many things have faded from my memory, perhaps because they are not important. However, it was these unimportant things that brought my life happiness and sorrow. Thank you for your writing. It has allowed me to see myself again through those bits and pieces of my life.

如今的我，已不再逼迫自己想很多了。因为我明白了我是为自己而活；不是为父母，更不是为别人。只有自己活得开心了，真正爱我的人才会开心。有时人想太多，反而会活得更累，更被束缚。所以将来我是留是去，都将取决于自己的态度和到时的情况。而无论哪种结局，我都会欣然接受，因为我相信生活是自己的；只要有信心，有努力，都会活得很精彩。

Now I no longer force myself to think too much because I have come to understand that I live for myself, not for my parents, let alone for others. Only when I live my life happily will the people who love me truly become happy. Sometimes if people think too much, they will live a more burdensome life with more constraints. Therefore, whether I will stay in Canada or return to China in the future will depend on my attitude and the situation I find myself in then. No matter what the decision might be, I will accept it with joy because I believe I live my own life. As long as I have confidence and work hard, I will live my life to its fullest potential.

回想在加拿大走过的七年，平淡如水，风清云定。但我也真正发现从容宁静的生活其实难能可贵。只要用心，平凡的生活也有智慧；只要有爱，会有一生的财富等待我们去珍惜。

As I think back about my life in Canada for the past seven years, it has been mundane, and boring at times, without too much happening. But I also discover the preciousness of living a life in peace and tranquility. As long as we put our heart into it, we can gain wisdom from a mundane life. As long as we have love, we have a whole lifetime of treasure waiting for us to cherish.

谢谢你，Lisa，我在你身上看到了一个女人的概念。

Thank you, Lisa. I see in you the concept of a woman.

玉兰

Yu-Lan

For Magnolia, my writing has given her the opportunity to remember herself and the time to understand herself. It has allowed her to see herself again through those bits and pieces of her life, which at the time seemed mundane and unimportant. Nevertheless, looking back, she realized that it was those small things that brought happiness and sorrow to her life. Magnolia has come to understand that she lives for herself, not for her parents, let alone for others. Now that her cousin is in a university program which will allow him to go to Australia for further studies, Magnolia does not consider him as one

reason that she has to stay in Canada. "Now I think I can only help others to realize their dreams, but I'm not obligated." She wrote on the margin. Magnolia is moving away from what her extended family expect her to do. She wants to be the author of her own life. I wonder how she is going to maintain her harmonious relationship with her home if she no longer wants to follow the script that has been written for her (Heilbrun, 1999, p. 102). Will they accept this new Magnolia as who she is? What stories around home Magnolia is going to compose in the future?

On July 22, 2005, *Mei* came to my office to share her thoughts with me after reading her chapter. We talked in Chinese and I reconstructed what she said in English:

> After reading my own chapter, I can see what I was thinking several years ago. Without this research, this could not have been possible. This chapter is a record of my development and growth in these few years of my life. It gives me an opportunity to reflect on my past experiences. Looking back, I find some of my thoughts were quite naïve. But that was how I thought at that time. I find it very interesting to read back. It is very helpful for me to see the choices I made and the struggles I went through at different points of time in my life. I will face similar choices and struggles in my future life. Now I know what I think right now might change in the future and that the decisions I made two years ago were the most reasonable at that time.
>
> After all, we were the first group of Chinese high school students coming here. We did not dare to take what we thought was a risky step of going back. We wanted to stay here. Later, some of those who came after us returned to China and found good jobs. Gradually we also change our mind. Going back to China does not seem like such a bad idea now. If we can find a good job in Canada, it's better to live here; if we can't find a satisfying job here, we might as well return to China.
>
> We were in schools in China before coming to Canada. We didn't know or experience much the dark side of the Chinese society. So we long to return to China. But our parents know their places well and they don't like some ugly aspects there. So they don't want us to return. But they don't know how hard and stressful it is to live in country not our own and to speak a language not our own. We are caught in between.

> Every piece you wrote made me stop and think, what actually happened at that time. If we don't think about them now, after a while we won't remember these happenings. It was interesting to read these stories. There were moments when I stopped reading and wondered: Is going abroad the best choice for us or not? As for me, it is worthwhile. But for others, is it a good choice? Up till now, going abroad has allowed me to go to graduate school. If I had stayed in China, I wouldn't have been admitted to a graduate school. I would have found a job after university. I would have gone to work day in and day out, just like everyone else. It would have been boring. Going abroad has allowed me to experience different things and to broaden my horizon. Many young people in China still dream of going abroad. If I hadn't come then, I would probably still want to come now. At least I have realized this dream. So it is worthwhile for me. Our peers in China have not experienced what we have gone through in Canada for the past several years. We have much more life experiences than they do because their parents take care of everything for them in China. We have learned to take care of ourselves even though we each are the only child of our family just like them.

For *Mei,* this research has given her an opportunity to reflect on her past experiences and to understand why she made the choice to stay in Canada two years ago. Looking back, she realizes that her thinking is always changing as she experiences new things in her life. She is slowly letting go of her staying-in-Canada story. Going-back-to-China does not seem like a bad idea to *Mei* any more. As much as she understands why her parents want her to stay in Canada, *Mei* realizes that it is she who knows what is best for her own life. On the margin, *Mei* wrote,

> Now I know where to go. The place where I belong is China. In the past I always struggled with where to stay. I know now! Even though I have already stayed here for seven years and I know it's a good place to live, I choose to go back. I will stay with my families, my relatives and my friends.

Mei thinks that it is worthwhile for her to come to Canada and finish two degrees. In addition, she has gained a lot of life experiences and broadened her horizon in Canada, which would not be possible had she stayed in China. She is happy that at least her

dream of going abroad came true. She is looking forward to finishing her master's degree and going home next year.

On July 29th, 2005, Jasmine wrote me the following letter in English:

Dear Lisa:

I read through my chapter and I would like to show my deep appreciation toward your hard work! Your chapter provides me with an opportunity to look back at my past 25 years because it summarizes all my major life experiences. Before I graduated from U of A in 2003, I was not mentally prepared to be an adult of my age. After several failure experiences, I began to learn to open myself to others and to communicate with people. And still, there are a lot of things to do to improve myself in my life. I did not give my feedback on every page of my chapter. I only wrote where it moved me the most. I did not make any change for the ending since it was only a stop mark for a part of my life. It does not matter if it was a very cheerful one or a little bit disappointing one since I will keep on going and learning. I believe that things will get better and better.

Jasmine

For Jasmine, my writing has provided her with an opportunity to look back at her life over the past 25 years because it describes all her major life experiences. She recognizes now that she was not as mature as she had thought she was two years ago. She is learning to open herself to others and to communicate with people. She knows that there are still a lot of things she needs to do in order to improve herself in her life. Although the ending of her chapter is not a cheerful one, Jasmine realizes that it is only a stop mark in her life and that she will keep on going and learning as she expects things will get better and better in her life.

Jasmine is leaving for Foggy City next Monday, September 26, 2005. After four months of job-hunting in Edmonton without any concrete result, she has decided to take a year off from her second degree program and go back to China to gain some practical work experience. Her parents will help her find a job there. She will return to Winnipeg next year to finish her second degree. With some work experience, she hopes that she will be able to find a job relevant to her area of studies in Alberta eventually. She still wants to immigrate to Canada some day.

While I was in San Diego, *Mei* sent me an email, asking for some help with her resume, which was in both Chinese and English this time. She is going to apply for jobs in China, *Mei* told me. She is going back to China this coming Christmas to try her luck there. She wants to finish her master's degree next spring and move back to China.

Magnolia also plans to finish her master's degree next spring, but she has no idea where to go next. Her parents want her to stay in Canada, but she wants to return to China. Unlike two years ago, "this time I can't wait to go back," she said. "After several years of floating alone in a foreign country, I am exhausted. I believe my home is in China, where I will live my life happily and meaningfully." I wonder if Magnolia will follow her own heart to return to China or if she will do what her parents expect her to do.

I don't know where I will be next year, either. Even as I get this doctoral degree, it is still foggy far ahead. I am still wondering who I am, where I am going, and what it is that I want for my life. Like Jasmine, Magnolia and *Mei*, I will have to make up my life as I go along.

Where will be our home then?

Epilogue

Journal Entry: October 16, 2005, Edmonton

I am sitting in front of the computer in my office, trying to start this last piece of my dissertation. My neck and shoulders are no longer stiff and the pain in my lower back is also gone. I knew quite a while ago that I wanted to write this story about the salmon. But where do I start? Maybe I will start from this summer.

I did not go to the Canadian Rocky Mountains to see the Chinook salmon this summer. I was exhausted towards the end of August as I had been trying so hard to finish this writing. I did not want to go anywhere. I did not want to see the salmon struggling upstream in order to go home. They know where home is. They can keep on going because they are almost there when I see them in the Rocky Mountains. They are back. They are home. And they are going to die. In a way, the salmon know what they are doing their whole lives. But I don't always know what is next. It is exhausting to live in this liminal space.

My family seems to have started this new tradition of visiting the salmon - my salmon, *Guoji* and *Yan-Yan* remind me because of the story I told them – every time we go to the Canadian Rockies in August. We know that these salmon are going home and we want to cheer them on their journey home.

* * *

August, 2003

On August 28, 2003, after a difficult and exhausting summer, working on a summer project full time and sorting out a very negative personal experience, I finally

joined *Guoji* and *Yan-Yan* to go to the mountains and visit the Chinook salmon again. I wanted to leave the university campus for a while. I needed a break to think some things through. I had been too busy and too tired to do that.

"Mom, you are going to see lots of them this time." *Yan-Yan* told me on our way to Calgary. There was obvious excitement in her voice. *Guo-Ji* had already taken her to see those salmon two weeks before when I was too busy working and couldn't go. *Guoji*'s business partner had sold the business in late July and he found himself suddenly have a lot of free time at his disposal.

I love hiking, so we planned a lot of hiking for this mountain trip. However, when we arrived in Kananaskis Country, our first stop, we were disappointed to find out that all the hiking trails had been closed since August 15 because of the forest fires in BC. It had been a very dry summer and the trees had already turned yellow. And I started to worry about the water level in Swift Creek and how that would affect those salmon, who were eager to go home. I couldn't wait to see them.

On the morning of August 30, *Guoji* drove me and *Yan-Yan* from Jasper to Mount Robson Provincial Park to visit the salmon. It was a bright sunny day with a beautiful Albertan clear blue sky I came to love so much. As we knew our route already, we did not plan to stop at the Park's Information Centre. However, we changed our mind the moment we saw the snow-covered top of Mount Robson. Right behind the Information Centre stood this magnificent mountain in the distance that took my breath away. This was the first time in all these mountain trips during the past five years that she did not hide herself away from me behind a veil of clouds. I found it very difficult to leave her right away. I felt a need to stay closer and to look at her more carefully. A few minutes

later, *Guoji*, *Yan-Yan* and I were on the hiking trail along the Mount Robson River. We stopped here and there to look up at the beautiful mountain from different viewpoints. It took us two hours to reach Kidney Lake, which was located at the foot of Mount Robson. On our way back, *Yan-Yan* was so tired that *Guoji* had to carry her on his back from time to time.

When we arrived at the Rearguard Falls, it was already 2:45 p.m. As I focused my attention on the two usual spots where the salmon would jump upstream, I noticed that there seemed to be more rocks in the white water this year. Then I realized that it was probably due to the lower water level. After waiting for about 10 minutes, I spotted only one salmon jump out of the white water at the other side of the river. It disappeared seconds later. I waited for another five minutes, hoping that it would make a second attempt. But *Yan-Yan* urged me to leave because "there are no salmon to be seen here." She was running up and down the stone stairs, complaining that she hadn't seen one salmon yet this time.

"There are far fewer salmon now than two weeks ago. How long do you want to stay here and watch them?" *Guoji* asked me.

I could stay here forever, I thought to myself. I knew they were coming back to the river that they left. Even though it was a bad year with very dry weather and fewer salmon would make it, but they were coming home. And I wanted to watch them. I did not want to leave yet, so I said, "Maybe until both you and *Yan-Yan* see one salmon."

Yan-Yan stopped running around and stood beside me and *Guoji* to watch the Falls.

"Is this just one salmon?" she asked. Hearing no response from us, she continued, "Maybe that's the only one, but it can't make it over the Falls. Mommy, I think I know a reason. Maybe it doesn't like the water...Oh, Mommy! I see one!"

Yes, indeed, we saw one big salmon jump out of the white water, but it slid back right downstream under the water and disappeared. Oh, no, we all sighed, feeling sorry that it did not succeed.

"salmon鱼快快跳，好让我们来看到。[20]" *Yan-Yan* started chanting in Chinese. "Oh, Mom, it rhymes!" she switched to English and then switched back to continue her Chinese chanting. She was trying everything she could to help the salmon go home.

"Only the strongest salmon can swim this far from the Pacific Ocean," I said, starting to walk up the stairs slowly on our way out. I turned my head several times, hoping to see one more salmon jump upstream. None did.

As we drove towards the Swift Creek, it was getting hotter and hotter inside the car. So *Guoji* turned the air-conditioning on to cool us off.

"The current temperature is 30 ℃," the radio announcer said. No wonder we were sweating.

We arrived at the Swift Creek at four o'clock. As soon as *Guoji* stopped the car, I jumped out and walked quickly to the spot, where I could watch the salmon most closely. The water level was 10 cm lower than usual, I noticed the mark on a wooden stick nearby. The creek seemed narrower with a lot of pebbles on the other side. There were no salmon in sight. As I looked farther, I saw one salmon being caught between the

[20] Salmon, salmon, hurry up! Let us see you jump!

pebbles because of the shallow water. It twisted its tail and managed to move to the deeper water to continue its journey upstream. I cheered loudly with the other tourists.

Guoji brought the video-camera to me. He knew that I would want to video-tape these wonderful creatures every time I visited them. But this time I stopped shortly when I noticed that one salmon was not moving in my viewfinder. I looked up from my video-camera and saw another salmon lying on the pebbles, motionless. My heart sank as I spotted several more dead salmon. My video-camera suddenly felt so heavy that I had to sit down and stop the video-taping. I closed my eyes for a while, trying to recover from the shock.

"Look, Mommy, there are two salmon swimming towards us," *Yan-Yan* exclaimed. I opened my eyes and saw a bigger and a smaller salmon swimming together.

"Aren't you happy that there are two alive, not all died?" *Yan-Yan* tried to comfort me.

"Perhaps, this year there are fewer salmon coming home," *Guoji* joined in. "It has been so dry. With such a low water level, it is difficult for them to swim home." Obviously, neither *Guoji* nor *Yan-Yan* was prepared to see this sight, either.

With two other tourists, the five of us followed these two salmon along the bank, moving back and forth as the salmon did in the water. We cheered when they swam upstream; we called out, "Oh, no, come back!" when they were swept downstream. It was so difficult for them to even move a short distance ahead.

"They surely need a lot of determination to go home," I said.

As we walked farther and farther upstream, we saw more and more dead salmon floating down the creek with their white bellies towards the sky.

"We should have a scarecrow in the water," *Yan-Yan* said when we saw a crow eating a dead salmon. "Mommy, did you video-tape the dead salmon?" she asked.

"No, I prefer not to. It's hard enough for me to watch them." I told her.

Just then I saw a big salmon floating by down the stream. I could tell it was still alive, but it did not swim. It just went with the water flow. I wondered if it had used up all its energy and had given up.

When we saw a local young man walking towards us, *Guoji* stopped him and asked, "Why are so many salmon dead this year?"

"Oh, their spawning ground is not far from here. They all die after spawning. And it's the end of August already." He told us matter-of-factly and walked away.

"They are dead fish now, but there's going to be lots of baby salmon next year, Mommy, maybe triplets or… I don't want to see them dead. Bye-bye!" *Yan-Yan* turned around and started walking back. *Guoji* and I just followed her. We had no idea when and where the other two tourists had left us.

We stayed at the Swift Creek for about 40 minutes. On our way back, *Yan-Yan* was so tired from all the walking that she fell asleep on the backseat very soon. *Guoji* knew that I probably needed some quiet time, so he just drove the car without saying a word.

I felt like crying, but I couldn't. I knew that in their death, and in what they are trying to do, is the genesis of the next generation. I knew that it is the way and it is the circle of life. But it was still so hard for me to watch them struggling upstream in order to go home. I wondered what drives them to come all this way from the ocean…

* * *

September, 2004

One year later, on September 5, 2004, we visited the Swift Creek again when *Guoji*'s brother flew in from New York City to have a holiday with us. The Creek was very quiet and after a long while, we spotted only one dead salmon at the bottom of the Creek. It was about 2.5 feet long, lying between the pebbles with its white belly facing upward. I wondered if it was happy that it came home and fulfilled its responsibility towards the next generation. I wondered if it ever regretted its choice of coming home instead of staying in the ocean… I wondered if it ever regretted leaving home some years earlier…

* * *

October 16, 2005

As I am sitting in front of the computer in my office, trying to finish this writing, I wonder what life choices I am going to make in the near future. Will I make a home in the ocean or will I go back or will I float somewhere in between? What story will I compose around home in my life as I yearn to leave this liminal space?

I think I will take it one day at a time…

Further Thoughts

Homemaking and Homecoming in a New Place

Journal Entry: December 6, 2005, Edmonton

I have been thinking about the story *Yan-Yan* told me on her first day at school this year for three months now. I wonder why it still bothers me since this time I did something about it soon after the incident happened.

On September 6, after a long summer break, *Yan-Yan* was eager to go back to her school. She said that she missed her school friends and teachers and that she could not wait to see them again. She insisted on going to the bus-stop 10 minutes earlier so that she would not miss her school bus in the morning. However, when she returned in the afternoon, she looked really annoyed and upset. What had happened? I wanted to know.

"Madame doesn't know how to say my Chinese name!" she told me angrily in English. "But she called out my Chinese name at the bus stop in such a weird way that I didn't hear it at first. When my friends told me that she might be saying my name, I listened because I am the only Chinese girl on that school bus. But it still didn't sound like my name!"

Yan-Yan felt so embarrassed that she did not want to talk to any of her friends on the bus when they all suddenly became interested and asked her how to say her Chinese name.

"They were really annoying, but I didn't say a word to them." She told me. "Mommy, I just want to forget about this whole thing. I am going to my room and play with my Lego now."

Yan-Yan went upstairs and closed her bedroom door while I remained in my seat at the kitchen table, not sure how to respond to this situation. For a moment, I regretted that I had chosen an English name for her. If only she had kept her Chinese name, she might not have had to go through this experience. I remembered vividly her stubborn refusal to accept Grace as her new name when she first came to Edmonton in May 2000, four months before her fourth birthday.

"My name is *Yan-Yan*." She told me then in Chinese. "I don't want any other name."

So I put aside Grace and let her be *Yan-Yan* when she went to her first daycare centre near Michener Park. However, very soon she noticed that *Yan-Yan* was mispronounced by her teachers and her peers in that daycare centre. It sounded more like a different Chinese character *Yang-Yang*. But *Yan-Yan* got used to it and thought that it was still close enough as her Chinese name.

In April 2001, she moved to her second daycare centre on the university campus because she wanted to be with her best friend, a Chinese girl whom *Yan-Yan* met in the first daycare centre and who also lived in Michener Park. When I asked her if she would like to have her English name for her new teachers and friends, she said that she still preferred *Yan-Yan*. So I put aside Grace again and let her be *Yan-Yan* throughout the four months she was there. Even though *Yan-Yan* came to sound more like *Yang-Yang* again when her teachers and peers called her, she was happy there.

Yan-Yan finally accepted Grace as her English name when she moved to her third daycare centre attached to an elementary school in August 2001. She was starting her kindergarten soon. When I asked her if she wanted *Jia-Yan* or Grace for her school

name[21], she chose Grace because she said, "my teachers and friends will never learn how to say *Jia-Yan* the right way". So on the daycare/school application form, I put down Grace *Zhou* as her preferred name and *Jia-Yan Zhou* as her legal name. When her kindergarten started one month later in September, *Yan-Yan* was quite comfortable with being called Grace, her new identity at school in Canada.

As much as I believed then that it was important for *Yan-Yan* to have her new Canadian identity, I also knew that it was more important for her to maintain her Chinese heritage. Hearing stories of my Chinese friends whose children could no longer speak Chinese to their parents after several years in Canada, I was very careful when looking for a school for *Yan-Yan*. I wanted to keep the Chinese language alive in her young life, but I was reluctant to send her into a Chinese-English bilingual program. Comparing two languages "leads all too readily to regarding one as superior" (Bateson, 1994, p. 24), so I needed to bring in a third language in *Yan-Yan*'s life in order to counter-balance the over-dominant presence of English. After the first progress report and the teacher-parent interview, it was obvious to *Guoji* and me that *Yan-Yan* was way ahead of her peers in her regular English kindergarten program and that she needed more academic challenges to grow intellectually. Before the Christmas break in 2001, we had decided to transfer *Yan-Yan* to a French immersion kindergarten program in another school. If nothing else, *Yan-Yan* would at least learn a third language because all the school subjects except English Language Arts would be taught in French.

Yan-Yan moved to this new school in January 2002 and has remained in the

[21] In China, a child has his/her pet name at home and in daycare centre. When she/he starts school, she/he usually uses the legal name.

French immersion program since then. She had been quite happy with her school until last September. In our eagerness to challenge her more academically, *Guoji* and I made a request to the school that *Yan-Yan* be transferred to a grade 3/4 split class instead of staying in her grade 3 class. The school principal agreed and on the third day of school *Yan-Yan* moved from her grade 3 class to the grade 3/4 split class, which consisted of 18 boys and 5 girls.

However, throughout the first six months of the school year, *Yan-Yan* often came back in tears, telling me how she was excluded by these five girls who did not want to play with her at recess. When I asked her if she wanted me to talk to her teacher about it, she said, "Mommy, it's my problem. I don't want you to talk to Madame about it." So I didn't. But I started to wonder if *Guoji* and I had made the right choice moving her up. I started to wonder what was more important for *Yan-Yan* as a Chinese child growing up in Canada. As new immigrant parents, it was/is so hard for us to make intelligent decisions about schooling for *Yan-Yan* in an unfamiliar environment (Bateson, 1994, p. 195).

One day in March this year, *Yan-Yan* came back with a happy and smiling face. "Mommy, I know how to solve my problem now." She told me excitedly. "I went to the other side of the school playground to visit my friends in the other class at recess today. I was so happy to see them and play with them. They were happy to see me, too. So I am going to visit them at every recess and forget all about these mean girls." So she did. For the remaining four months, she traveled frequently between the two sides of her school in order to be with her friends. She was a happy little girl again.

Towards the end of June, I asked *Yan-Yan* if she wanted me to write a letter to her teacher about putting her back with her best school friend in the other class for her grade

4. She agreed. I wrote and then read the letter to her. She listened and told me again that was what she wanted. She took the letter to her teacher the following day.

Now *Yan-Yan* is with her friends and her grade 3/4 split class teacher continues to be her grade 4 teacher. She should be happy at school now, but obviously she isn't yet. What can I do as a parent and as an educator to make school a happy place for her and all the other children in similar situations? I feel a need to do something about it this time. But what should I do?

My dissertation writing stopped for three days as I tried to figure out what action would be appropriate in this situation. My last chapter could wait, I decided. On the morning of Friday, September 9, I drafted the following letter:

> Dear Mme Principal,
>
> After a lot of hesitation, I decide to write you this letter regarding my daughter's Chinese name. Her legal name is *Jia-Yan Zhou*, but she prefers to be called Grace *Zhou* at school at the moment.
>
> On Tuesday, September 6, her first day at school this term, *Yan-Yan*, my 9-year-old daughter came back, looking upset and annoyed. When I asked her about it, she said that after school, at the bus stop, you did a roll call to make sure that everybody on the list was there. But you called out her Chinese name in such a weird way that even she could not understand. Consequently she did not hear you. She felt embarrassed and annoyed on the bus when everybody asked what her Chinese name was. She did not talk at all until she reached her bus stop and got off.
>
> *Yan-Yan* is not yet comfortable teaching her Canadian teachers and peers how to say her Chinese name properly. She wants so much to fit in. I understand as a new-immigrant parent and as an educator. But I also understand that in order to be successful at school, she needs to be happy with who she is – a Chinese-Canadian. Her Chinese heritage will always be a part of who she is and who she is becoming. And I do hope that you and your school will be a strong support for that fragile part of her identity.
>
> In fact, some of *Yan-Yan*'s school experiences with her Chinese heritage have been quite positive. I remember when she was in grade 2, on Valentine's day, she showed me very proudly her Valentine's card, using English, German, French,

Spanish, Chinese, Persian and American Sign Language to say "I love you". When one of her classmates discovered that she was adding "我爱你" to her card, she begged *Yan-Yan* to write these three Chinese characters in her card as well. Very soon, there was a long line in front of her desk. She ended up with a very sore wrist that day, but she was so happy!

Yan-Yan also told me that last year in her grade 3 class, her teacher actually asked her to repeat her family name *Zhou* three times in front of the whole class in order to learn it. Later, when she transferred to thé grade 3/4 split class, her teacher again asked her how to say her Chinese name several times. Unfortunately, *Yan-Yan* was not comfortable and confident enough to teach her the proper way of saying her Chinese name. She just assumes that Canadians will never learn how to say Chinese names properly because the majority of her Chinese friends have English names. As for the very few who keep their Chinese names, their names no longer sound like Chinese to a Chinese person after they go to school or daycare centre. What has happened inside the walls of school and daycare centre?

When Chinese parents name their child, they put their dreams, hopes and aspirations for that child in that name. That name is full of personal meaning and significance. For example, *Jia* means good and *Yan* means beautiful in Chinese. I know how difficult and challenging it is to pronounce correctly some strange combinations of the alphabet in a different language. But please do ask *Yan-Yan* how to say her Chinese name properly before you call out her name the next time. I know it is a small thing, but it will mean a lot in her young life as she is trying to figure out who she is and who she is becoming.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Yi Li

p.s. *Yan-Yan* told me that she likes some of the new changes at school this year. For example, the students are allowed to enter the school as soon as the bell rings. They no longer have to form a line first and then go in. The students can eat lunch in their own classrooms. I think you are trying to make this school a better place for all the students.

Not sure if I should send this letter to the school, I emailed it in the afternoon to one of my most trusted Canadian friends Janice Huber, who is now a professor at the School of Education in St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. Janice used to be

an elementary school teacher in Edmonton. She would know better than I do about what I should do in order to help *Yan-Yan* in this situation.

Janice responded very positively to my email in the evening, saying that I should send this letter to school. On Sunday, September 11, I read the letter to *Yan-Yan* and told her that I would email this letter to her school principal the following day. She nodded her head in agreement.

I got a reply from the school principal before noon on Monday. In her email, she sincerely apologized for the "weird" way she said Grace's Chinese name. She wrote that the very last thing she would want to do was hurt her feelings. I was surprised when I read that *Yan-Yan* actually took the initiative the next day and told her she could call her Grace! This little girl of mine surely loves solving her own problems in her own way!

The principal also promised that she would quietly meet with *Yan-Yan* that day, share her apologies with her and ask her how to say her Chinese name. She appreciated my positive comments about the changes she had made to the school.

I felt a great sense of relief after reading her reply. I wanted to be positive. I wanted to encourage the principal in her efforts to make the school a better place for all children. I wanted to encourage the teachers, who were hardworking and loving, but might not have the new skills or information yet to support their transition from teaching in a traditionally white classroom to teaching in an increasingly diverse classroom with children from all four corners of the world. I wanted them to start thinking about what were some of the other ways that might bring comfort to children in the school, not just the often visible things. I wanted them to start thinking about how to make this school a

happy place since "children (and adults, too) learn best when they are happy" (Noddings, 2003, p. 2).

Yan-Yan came back in the afternoon with a big grin on her face. "Madame apologized to me today." She said, "She even asked me to teach her how to say my Chinese name. I taught her five times, but she still didn't get it!"

"Yeah, sometimes it is hard for grown-ups to learn new things." I said. "Will you teach her again if she asks you the next time?"

"Yes, I will." She answered and went upstairs to her room to play with her Lego.

On the evening of September 15, I went to *Yan-Yan*'s school for "Meet the Staff & Curriculum Night". Before her opening remarks, the principal introduced her staff one by one to the parents, who gathered in the school gym. She called out each of her staff by their full name and told us who they were and/or which grade/subject area she/he taught. I could not help but smile to myself when she stopped and took the time to ask a new teacher how to say her Slavic family name properly in front of the whole crowd. She repeated after her several times, but still shook her head and said that she needed more practice. I would like to think that my letter had made a difference! If not a big one, at least it helped this principal become more aware that it was important to affirm and accept the teacher as who she was in her school as well! To use Noddings' words, teachers teach best when they are happy, too.

I told this story of my letter to the principal to my friends at Research Issues Conversations at CRTED when it happened. They all agreed with Janice that I should send it to the principal. As I retell the story in this writing now, I come to realize why it still bothers me. I am starting to live a new story, a story of active participation in

matters that are most important to me and my child in this new place. I am starting to feel that it is possible to come home and to make a home in Canada as Bateson (1994) wrote, "Learning to know a community or a landscape is a homecoming. Creating a vision of that community or landscape is homemaking" (p. 213).

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